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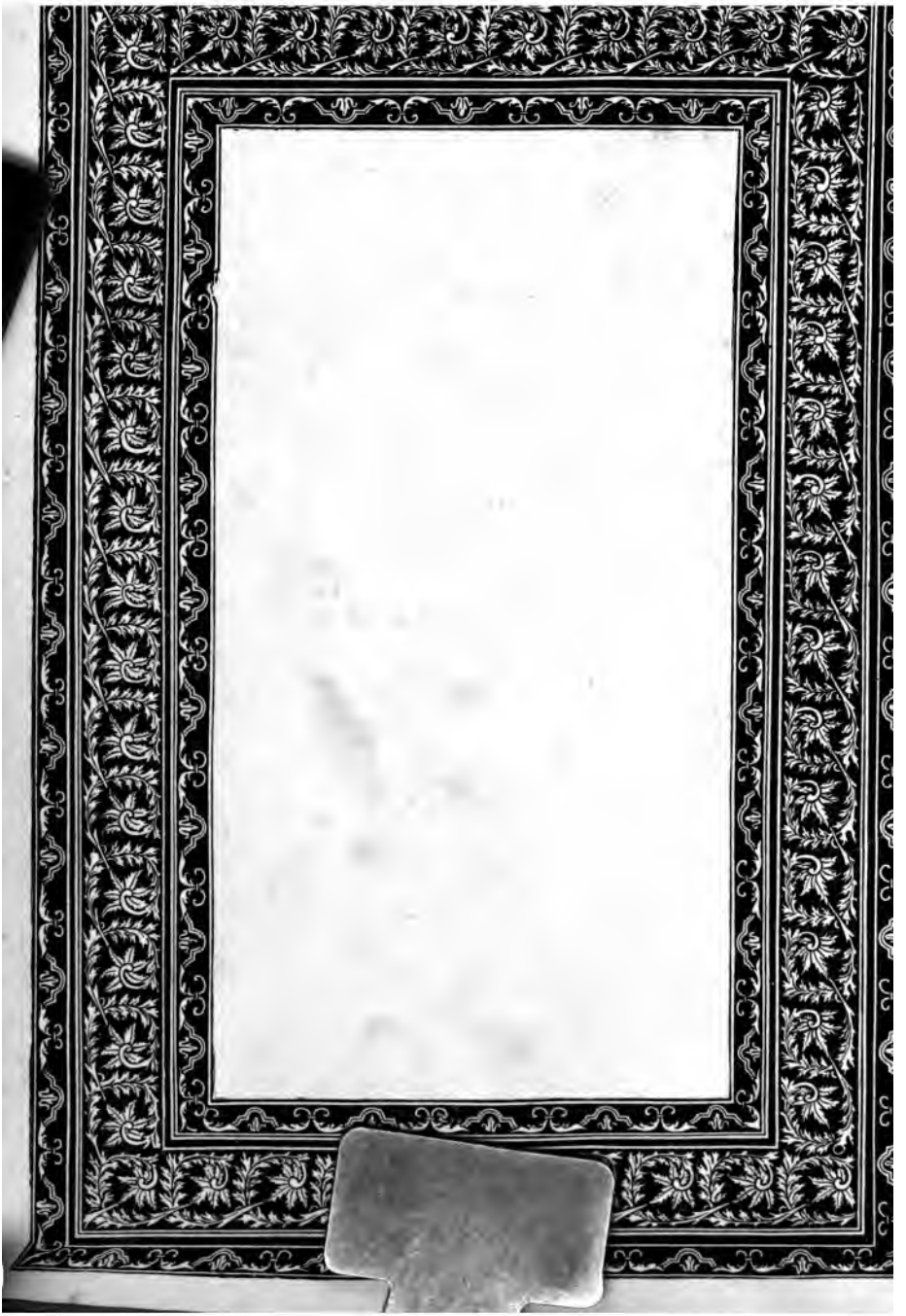
THE GREAT ARTISTS

MEISSONIER



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MEISSONIER

" The whole world without Art would be one great wilderness."

MEISSONIER

BY

JOHN W. MOLLETT, B.A.

OFFICIER DE L'INSTRUCTION PUBLIQUE, FRANCE
AUTHOR OF 'LIFE OF SIR DAVID WILKIE'
ETC

LONDON
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PREFACE.

IN all matters of disputation I think that the biographer and the critic should be two persons: the witness should not assume the function of the advocate.

There is no greater temptation than hero-worship to the student of the life of a man of genius and industry and worth, and it is impossible to study the history of such a life as the following without becoming filled with sympathy for its subject.

I should, therefore, had I attempted criticisms of my own, have been a partial and worthless judge. The question of M. Meissonier's merit in the great arena in which his temporary, or permanent, victory has been won will not be decided in our day. He represents a method of dealing with art which is, and will always be, detestable to one school of thought, and admirable to its opposite. He is essentially, if I may use the expression, a *party painter*, and, as the permanent victory of his school would represent the overthrow of the whole system of theories and principles which the lovers of the "IDEAL" call the Renaissance of Art, so the history of his success, in the judgment of the academic writers of his own country, offers only a new application of Voltaire's celebrated *mot*, "Demandez au crapaud ce que c'est que la beauté," &c.

For the conflict which will rage over his memory, as it

does to this day over that of many an ancient master, I contribute a few tumbrils of ammunition to either side, and have found the impartial setting down in order of a selection of conflicting criticisms the most convenient form of doing so. The work, as happily the life, is far from complete. Unlike the work of the Master himself, the details are only indicated, but they refer the student who cares to go deeper into the subject, to sources which will lead him further; and, I hope, supply the less careful reader with a general idea of the significance, for good or for evil as he may have been led to regard it, of Meissonier's mission in art.

J. W. M.

BLACKHEATH,
October, 1881.

LE BON COUSIN.
From the "Contes Drolatiques."

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[1] Given in the Sale "Catalogue de Tableaux, composant la gallerie de M. John W. Wilson" (March, 1881).

*** The etchings numbered 5, 8, 11 are published by Messrs. Goupil et Cie. of Paris, and Bedford Street, Covent Garden.

LE BON HOTELIER.
From the "Contes Rémois."

MEISSONIER.

CHAPTER I.

IT has happened to M. Meissonier, perhaps, as often as to any living man of celebrity, to have the pleasure of reading the history of his own life, written from the point of view of a biographer constrained by a necessity, which must have been very amusing to his subject, to evolve the greatest part of his work out of a process of imagination and conjecture. The life of the Nestor of French art is not yet public, and it is to be hoped, in consideration of the important epoch that his works mark, that his Boswell will in due time arise. In the meantime his works are before the world, and among them, the most characteristic and interesting, his *houses*. Every biographical notice of M. Meissonier begins with a description of his ateliers at Paris or at Poissy, in the arrangement and decoration of which he has expressed in the concrete the ideal of his earliest pictures, "Le milieu explique l'homme, l'atelier commente l'œuvre." The saying of Diderot, with which M. Jules

Claretie heads his recently-published biographical sketch, has more truth with reference to M. Meissonier than in general.

The Paris house of M. Meissonier is in the Boulevard Malesherbes, near the Parc Monceau; a brilliantly-written description of it has appeared in "The World" (of June 2, 1880). It is in the heart of the artists' quarter, and the architecture of the whole neighbourhood is as characteristic of its inhabitants as our own Hampstead and other quarters where artists congregate. M. Meissonier has built his house in the style of the Italian Renaissance:—

> "There is little to see outside, beyond a large expanse of masonry as neatly joined as a piece of cabinet-work: but within, you have the terraces and the arcades which form such charming backgrounds in the pictures of the Italian School. It is the Italian Renaissance adapted, of course, to modern French needs. The *porte cochère* is very much like any other *porte cochère*, and seems only to promise you a mansion of the common type; but pass through it and you are in a spacious courtyard, in one corner whereof you see a richly-carved Gothic stairway, with an arched terrace forming the boundary on the other side. There is little ornamentation on the outside of the turret; just as much as the style permits, no more: but what there is, is simply as delicate in workmanship as a bit of embroidery painted by Meissonier's own hand. This is true of all the place. The owner has chosen a style which admits but sparingly of ornament, and which depends chiefly for its effect on the purity of unbroken line. But where the ornament comes in, he has taken care to have it of the best. He has been his own designer. For the years during which the house has been in progress, he has worked as an architect as well as a painter. Not a bit of the decoration in galleries, staircases, and rooms but has been done from his own designs. He has kept rigorously to the laws of his design. You pass from the courtyard to the studio, through a pillared hall, and up a staircase rich in carved panelling, for in the interior the style admits of somewhat greater luxuriance. Then you come to the prime wonder of the house—its immense studio. There are two ateliers; but

> the larger one, for some reason best known to the painter, serves as a kind of antechamber to the smaller. The latter is a retreat to which Meissonier, who is one of the shyest of men, escapes from the world. It is difficult to give an idea of the amplitude of the great one without going into measurements; but certainly it would hold the deliberative assembly of a small State. Here again a rich panelling runs round the walls, and the place looks too fine for daily work. From the smaller studio we may pass out into the open air by a gallery which forms the roof of the arcade, and make the round of the premises to the coach-houses and stables, all in perfect keeping of style. Even the back stairs are, in their way, exquisite specimens of early Italian work."

The hall is hung with curtains and tapestry, the windows are shaded by finely-interlaced ornaments of ironwork; but M. Jules Claretie, in his visit to Meissonier in 1871, which he describes, was most astonished at the works of art with which the studio, large as it is, was "encumbered:" sketches, small panels, and wax models, the instruments of his daily work, and among the pictures hanging upon the walls, a water-colour portrait of the painter himself, seated, wearing a pair of high shooting-boots, with a dog at his side; a landscape of Italy, glowing with sunlight, a grove of enormous olive trees dappling the pathway with shadow; a portrait of Meissonier's medical attendant, hung by the side of a picture by Metsu; and, "in the centre of the wall, opening it out like a window, a canvas of enormous dimensions, representing the demolished palace of the Tuileries, the heap of ruins that were left from the wreckage of May 1871, and, dominating the mounds of grey or gilded fragments, the bronze chariot on the Arc du Carrousel appearing through a break in the cloud of smoke, sharply outlined against the blue sky behind it." Masterpieces of art are scattered broadcast over the room: a courtyard of the time of Louis XIII., brilliantly crowded with figures in

gala dress; a bride of the same period, stepping into an elegant carriage of a crimson colour, for which Meissonier had a miniature model, built by a coachmaker, to study from; a superb work of Titian—a figure of an Italian woman, in a robe of green velvet, the classic outline of her head shown against a crimson velvet curtain in the background; a sketch of Bonaparte, on horseback, at the head of his picturesquely-dressed staff, reviewing the young conscripts of the army of Italy, who are cheering as he passes, waving their hats and bayonets in the air "in a fever of enthusiasm, youth, and victory;" a company of dragoons of the Imperial army descending a hilly path in an Alsatian forest, under the guidance of a peasant; of which picture M. Claretie remarks that "every soldier has a distinct and special type of countenance;" and, in addition to the pictures, the hall is crowded with small statuettes of wax, modelled by Meissonier himself for his studies, representing such subjects as men on horseback and horses in various forms of motion, the muscles of which are modelled with a perfection of anatomical accuracy and boldness. Amongst the other objects collected in this remarkable museum are a number of bridles of black leather, with silver ornaments and curious bits, which were once the property of Murat—and a remarkable miniature portrait of M. Thiers, taken from the body after death, by Meissonier, at St. Germains, which M. Claretie describes as follows:—

> "A head with closed eyes, an expression of irony still remaining about the lines of the mouth, and of sarcasm or banter ('quelque chose de narquois') upon the waxen and motionless face; the silvery grey colour of the hair responding to the tone of the white drapery. . . . But one of the most remarkable ornaments of this atelier, crowded as it is with exquisite works of art, is the first sketch of the picture which Meissonier painted at Poissy in 1871, when his house was crowded with

German soldiers. To escape their company, in the rage that he experienced at the national defeat, he shut himself up in his studio and threw upon the canvas the most striking, the most vivid, the most *avenging* (vengeresse) of allegories: he painted Paris, enveloped in a veil of mourning, defending herself against the enemy, with her soldiers and her dying grouped round a tattered flag; sailors, officers, and fusiliers, soldiers, national guards, suffering women, and dying children; and hovering in the air above them, with the Prussian eagle by her side, was Famine, wan and haggard Famine, accomplishing the work that the bombardment had failed to achieve. . . . Henri Regnault is represented on this canvas, dying at the feet of the veiled figure of Paris."

Besides his Paris mansion, Meissonier has another at Poissy, where he lives in the summer time. Here there are two studios, one at the top of the house, and the other adjoining the stables, for use in inclement weather. "The Salon at Poissy has those quaint little square windows which so often figure in the backgrounds of his pictures. He built the country house as he built the house in town, and he fitted it up with artistic luxuriance, designing most of the furniture himself, notably the silver services of the table. Each place has cost him something in millions. The bill for the house in Paris was augmented by his resolution to have all the work of the very best. He takes a peculiar pride in the thoroughness of the mechanical part of it. The stones are beautifully fitted and joined, and the building has scarcely settled an inch since the foundations were laid."[1]

Having thus far satisfied the maxim of Diderot, in a short description of the "milieu," we will, still profiting by the indiscretions of his friend M. Claretie, make acquaintance with the man whom it "explains," and after-

[1] "The World," June 2, 1880.

wards with his work—which will be a far more complex and difficult task to accomplish. We have already seen him in his patriotism, shutting himself up in his studio away from the contact of the Prussians, and there devising the allegory "vengeresse," which he intended should cut them to the heart. It is not derogatory to the truth and earnestness of his patriotism that he should now be "a very good Republican;" although, in the time of the Empire, there is no doubt that he was attached to the dynasty of which every Frenchman, whatever he may choose to say to the contrary, is proud; if any other evidence of this were wanting, it would be found in the spirit with which he has treated the grand historical pictures that he has painted of incidents in the histories of the two Napoleons. The intense expression that he has given to the enthusiasm of the attachment of the army to their great leader, is a monument of glory to the first Napoleon that was not designed by a lukewarm partisan; nor the dignity of his sorrow in "1814," (*La Retraite de Russie*) for which Meissonier dressed himself in an old coat of the Emperor's, and sat on a saddle on a housetop in the falling snow of a gloomy day in winter, and so, with a mirror before him, painted in the sombre tints of the winter sky on the flesh of his face, and the flakes of snow on his coat-sleeves; nor the trumpet-toned triumph of the Battle of Solferino, nor the other historical pictures which will perpetuate the old stories of victory and domination which must have become familiar to the painter in his cradle.

He was born at Lyons in the year 1811. One writer says 1813; but M. Claretie tells us very briefly that, after an infancy of poverty, a difficult entrance into life, at the age of nineteen he came to Paris, in the year 1830; an arrival full of vicissitudes, and dangers, and sorrows.

"Well for him that he was born robust—but what is a struggle, even in misery, for a true-born artist? 'L'art vit de misère, il meurt de richesse!' says M. Alexandre Dumas. I have read somewhere, I do not remember where, that in these dark days of his *débuts*, Meissonier used to work, side by side with Daubigny, at the production of pictures for five francs per square mètre, for export. It is perhaps only a studio tradition. But it is a fact that Tony Johannot, to whom Meissonier exhibited his studies at that time, gave him encouragement, and that Léon Cogniet opened his studio to him. But he had nothing to gain from Cogniet; he brought to his earliest works his master qualities, his gift of seeing and describing objects with originality, an incomparable understanding of physiognomy and of costume, refinement of touch, extraordinary accuracy of drawing, the sharp expression of mental emotion in the expression of the features, strict truthfulness in the painting of accessories. He was Metzu, Miéris, or Terburg, possessing besides qualities peculiarly his own, elegant, very fascinating, and very French."

Of his early life he is said to be reluctant to speak, and, as we have seen, even the date of his birth is not free from a slight mystery of uncertainty. A French writer, we are told, who went to him for the first biography which appeared, was astonished at his reluctance to furnish any details of his life. His natural love of retirement is attributed by the writer to timidity, and to the fact that he has been severely and, with his peculiar temperament, exceptionally, tried by the misfortunes of his country; but when one has studied through the long line of his works of art, and has noticed how completely they are characterized by the quality of *individuality*, uninfluenced by any of the currents of opinion and taste that have flowed round them, another reason appears for the separation or solitude of such a life as his. His art, and the means by which he pursued it, being the whole of his life, and differing in its nature from the art that he saw prevailing around him, he seems

to have set himself to a steady, self-contained career, developing with unsparing industry his own methods, and probably not less happy, as he certainly is not less eminent, in his life than the most festive or the most political of his colleagues. However this may be, M. Claretie says of him that—

> "That which is most pleasing with Meissonier, is the frank cordiality with which he explains his plans, and looks in your face the while with his deep, clear eyes (de son œil profonde et franc) for the truth of your meaning in reply. This man, who lives in a palace, is as moderate as a soldier on the march. This artist whose canvases are valued by the half million is as generous as a nabob. He will give to a charity sale a picture worth the price of a house. Hospitably friendly (accueillant) to all, and praised as he is by everybody, he has less conceit in his nature than a wholesale painter (que des barbouilleurs à la toise). With his hair growing thickly above his broad and open forehead, his beard flowing down over his breast like a river, his robust activity 'de bon cavalier,' he is at the age of sixty-eight as solid and as active as at forty. You see him to be 'well-seasoned,' sympathetic, and safe; a man who loves his friends as he loves the Truth, with all the passion of a man of twenty years."

This is his compatriot's description of M. Meissonier's personality, and I think it is a better one than the following by the writer in "The World."

> "He is as short as the average French linesman, but very broad. There is nothing of the typical genius about the outer man. He has but to sit opposite a looking-glass to have an excellent model of a professor of gymnastics, or a fencing-master growing old. He has a round full face, plenty of colour in his cheeks, and a bright eye, so animated in its expression that it makes you entirely forget the effect of his grey hair and beard. Intellectually and physically he would seem to be still in his prime. A friend who is modelling a statuette of him, which stands in the studio, has admirably caught this effect of wiry robustness which is the note of the figure. He has put him in the short pilot-jacket in which he usually works, and has

> planted him very firmly on his legs. He has seized, in fact, the expression of a body as well as the expression of a face, and this is one of the rarest things in portrait art."

In the "Gazette des Beaux Arts" for 1862, the May number is almost entirely devoted to M. Meissonier; it contains first a sketch of his life and work as a painter, by M. Théophile Gautier, and immediately following upon that an account of his engraved work. It is to this last that we now turn for the clue to the story of the steady progress of Meissonier's skill and success, and especially for the influence that kept him aloof from all the theories and novelties of his time and started him at the threshold of his career upon a course clearly indicated in his earliest works, and from which he seems never to have been tempted to deflect. It is in the quality of his earliest illustrations that the germs of that of his latest and most successful paintings are to be found; and the methods of careful elaboration and conscientious combination of detail that he applied to his earliest *culs de lampe* foreshadow the brilliant successes of his pencil when years of practice had grafted boldness and freedom upon the unerring precision of truthfulness "en gros et en détail" with which he seems to have been gifted in the cradle. The earliest beginnings of M. Meissonier's work are surrounded with obscurity, and it is not accurately on record by whom he was first employed. "Seven cities of Greece," says M. Burty, "disputed the glory of producing Homer: and several editors now claim the honour of having encouraged the first beginnings of M. Meissonier." Assuming the date of the master's birth to be accurately fixed at 1811 (although even this detail is disputed, some authorities giving 1813), he would be already twenty-four years of age upon the publication of the 1835 edition of the Bible of the Sieur Raymond ("Hist. de

l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament représenté par des figures," etc. Paris, L. Curmer, editeur, rue Sainte Anne, 1835), to which he contributed designs, on page 289, of *Holofernes invading Judea, and Judith appearing before Holofernes*, and on page 347 of the *Death of Eleazer*.

These designs, M. Burty assumes to have been the first from Meissonier's pencil that were actually published, although, he adds, there was a day during the early years of the reign of Louis Philippe, when, at the instigation of Trimolet, M. Meissonier went to knock at the door of an editor in the Rue St. Jacques, taking with him four little sepia drawings destined, in his dreams, to illustrate a fairy tale in some childrén's magazine. The editor, a man of sense, said that the drawings were charming, but he drew back before the outlay of having them engraved, and "avec mille politesses, congédia le jeune artiste."

M. Gautier mentions as the first paintings exhibited by M. Meissonier, those of 1836, *The Chess Players* and *The Little Messenger*, which, he says, attracted a crowd of admirers, and in which he struck at once his true line as the conscientious and skilful painter of miniature subjects, in the exquisite finish of which he has been thought equal to Terborch and Metsu. The period of exquisite finish and minute detail will, however, be best studied in the engraved work of the master, which has the further great value of indicating *ab initio* his higher quality of sympathy, and of that so-called *grandeur* which can be found in the smallest as well as in the largest works, and in simple domestic subjects or objects of still life as well as in the highest classical school, which is really the distinguishing characteristic of Meissonier and his peers in art, and implies in the artist the existence of a trué vocation for his pursuit.

M. Gautier was, however, apparently, mistaken in assum-

THE CHESS-PLAYERS

ing the pieces he names to have been the first exhibited by M. Meissonier; for there is in the collection of Sir Richard Wallace a small picture, called *The Visitors*, of an interior, with an old gentleman receiving two visitors—all in the costume of the period of our James I., which is not remarkable so much for the finish of its detail, as for a Rembrandt-like management of the light falling on the heads and white ruffs of the figures, and reflected from a claret-jug and glasses on a table. To the back of a photograph taken from this canvas M. Meissonier has been good enough to attach the following autograph memorandum:—"Mon premier tableau exposé en 1833 ou 1834; acheté *cent francs* par La Société des amis des Arts à Paris, et adjugé à M. Poturle, qui l'a toujours gardé. Après sa mort il a été acheté par Sir Richard Wallace."—ЭМ.

M. Burty describes five woodcuts, of a very early date, which he found torn from the leaves of some scrap book or journal; representing in a mingled humorous and pathetic sentiment as many scenes from the life of "The Old Bachelor." They will show the class of work to which the young painter first bent his energies, in which, if he had persevered, he might have achieved a success for which the nation would have had reason to be grateful, as it might have tended to preserve the school of comic illustration in France from the utter degradation of pruriency and brutalism into which it has subsequently sunk. In the first of the series we are introduced to the Old Bachelor at his toilette, in front of his mirror, his wig on the commode in front of him. In the second he is dining with two friends, who have the air, says M. Burty, of "de *fieffés parasites*," in the next he is abused by his housekeeper, and in the fourth the poor old gentleman is seen on his death-bed surrounded by greedy relations eager for the succession

to his estate; in the last, Death has released him from his solitude, and his servants in the death chamber are already ransacking his property. There is in all this a combination of the humour of Hogarth with the sympathetic quality of the more refined humorists of our subsequent period which was developed to great promise in Meissonier's later works of illustration. The young painter was already gifted with a considerable portion of that versatility of talent which is an attribute of real genius, and showed this in the next series of illustrations, published again by his friend, M. Curmer to the "Discours sur l'Histoire universelle," for which he drew the figures of *the Prophet Isaiah*, *St. Paul*, and *Charlemagne*, besides a considerable number of tail-pieces, headings for chapters, and ornamental letters. He was engaged at the same time upon the illustrations to a new edition of Lamartine's "Chute d'un ange," of which the woodcuts were most unsatisfactorily engraved. It appears from the narrative of M. Burty, that the art of wood engraving was not at that time much cultivated at Paris, and the blocks of this and other early works of M. Meissonier were sent to England to be engraved, and the English engravers, says M. Burty, *massacred* them. M. Lavoignat had not yet been discovered, whom M. Burty describes as the most faithful interpreter of the works of Meissonier; "who, by details of which the caprice is astounding and the execution a miracle of rashness and refinement froze the *blacks* into *greys*, and developed all that the *furia Française* contains of *calculated impetuosity* and *serious levity*." It is not easy to follow this criticism unless by attributing to the writer some of the paradoxical qualities that he describes.

An edition in French of the "Orlando Furioso," published at this time with illustrations by Français, Karl

Girardet, Baron, and others, contains two woodcuts from Meissonier's designs representing (No. 1, chapter I.) *Ferragus in the wood:* (No. 2, chapter II.) *Bradamante discovering Pinabel.*

It is a most interesting occupation to follow through this series of early works the apprenticeship of a genius, in the tentative efforts of which the qualities of humour, invention, sympathy, and keen apprehension of detail are manifested, for which the master is still unrivalled, and in the companion works published under the same covers to find in Tony Johannot and the other group of illustrators with whom he was associated, the tone and character of the school in which his early years of work were principally passed. This interest especially attaches to a beautiful edition of "Paul and Virginia," and the "Chaumière Indienne," published in 1838 by M. Curmer, profusely illustrated with the assistance of a very powerful staff of artists and engravers. This very beautiful and fascinating volume contains forty-three woodcuts from Meissonier in the text, besides innumerable ornamental letters, emblematic designs called "attributs," landscapes, plants, foliage, and a few compositions; and one important vignette of the "Bay (or Valley) of the Tomb," which is a breezy and spacious landscape, finished with close fidelity both to the character and details of the tropical vegetation, and to the sentiment of the subject; the general combined effect of solitude and desolation in the midst of tropical luxuriance intensifying the pathos of the incident that it illustrates. This landscape of Meissonier's impressed the other artists engaged in the work so favourably that, among the "attributs" of the book itself:—a little emblem picture at the head of the Table of Contents:—along with the portraits of Français and Tony Johannot, the painter's easel and other accessories,

a miniature reproduction of "The Bay of the Tomb" has been inserted; as though it were regarded among the illustrations as the gem of the collection. In the floral and other ornaments of initial letters, and head and tail pieces of chapters, Meissonier's minute attention to Nature produces the happiest effects. "These engravings," says M. Burty, "have a peculiar interest, because they are the work of the master's youth; and they show him already rendering Nature in a style quite his own; to look through them is like turning over a volume of his 'cahiers d'études.' They contain evidence of long and careful work in the hot-houses of the 'Jardin des Plantes,' and in front of the old bric-a-brac dealers' stalls which used to stand about the entrance to the Louvre. And how admirably, with the help of these slowly and scrupulously finished studies, he could reproduce in an ornamental letter or floral ornament, a lily broken by the storm, or a sheaf of Indian arms and musical instruments!"

To the "Chaumière Indienne," published in continuation in the same volume, Meissonier contributed no less than eighty-six woodcuts, which lighten up the gentle pathos of St. Pierre's work with humour and manliness, and leaving it as delicate and tender as before, bring into the foreground all that is quaint and humorous in its incidents. In the scene, for instance, where the brave old English Doctor sits on the wharf and recalls to mind his wanderings in many lands in search of truth, we have a panoramic procession of the images passing through his mind: the "Jewish Rabbis," in hats and beards and an air of shrewdness and wealth about them—with whom the Doctor is friendly and persuasive; "the Protestant ministers," clean shaven and cold of humour, attired in black skull caps and Geneva gowns; the "overseers of the Lutheran Church" in Elizabethan

frills—with whom the Doctor is disputatious; and the smug and trim "Catholic Doctors," orthodox and respectable from their wigs to their shoe-buckles, with whom he is courtly and polite. Then the "Academicians of Paris, La Crusca, the Arcadi, and the twenty-four other most celebrated Academies of Italy," all snoring round a table in every imaginable attitude of repose, under the Doctor's longiloquence, from whom the Doctor is departing in a huff, with his wig awry. And this is followed by the long procession of Greek Popes, Turkish Mollahs, Arab Sheikhs, Parsees and Indian Pandects, each one of whom is recognizable, and characteristically distinct.

Many might read Bernardin de St. Pierre without entering fully into the fun of his pedantic periods, but the humour of Meissonier's illustrations, as soberly and seriously expressed is as obvious as it is original and sympathetic. The marvellous skill with which he can arrange a large or complicated subject in a nutshell, is exemplified in these little woodcuts.

There is one, not an inch square, containing no less than eleven typical heads of Indians, each characteristically distinct, where "the Pandects, the Fakeers, the Santons, the Joguis, the Brahmins, and their disciples," all cry out at once against the Doctor when he protests against the shutting up of knowledge in their privileged caste; and there is an admirable individuality in the person of the good impassible Doctor himself, who is always the same old friend, in his varied perplexities—bewildered amongst the fascinating Bayadères; or patiently undergoing purification in the Ganges; or striding up to the audience of the priest of Juggernaut enveloped in a cotton sheet; or sitting at home among his books and *remembering* his friend the Pariah. Some critic, most unfairly judging

Meissonier by a conventional rule, has pronounced him devoid of sentiment. But what more manly or pathetic sentiment can be desired than that which lurks beneath the humour of a little vignette of the incident of the Pariah? The whole picture, an inch in height, scarcely crosses a page. It represents a slip of wall, with a picture at either end, one labelled "The Pariah thinking of the English Doctor," and the other, "The English Doctor thinking of the Pariah," and in the middle on a nail driven into the wall hang the pipes that they exchanged at parting. "The Doctor's pipe of English leather with a mouthpiece of yellow amber," and "The Pariah's pipe of a bamboo stem and a *furnace* of clay," and underneath the pipes a paper is pinned to the wall with the inscription "La pipe du Docteur et celle du Paria, *tirés du cabinet de M. Meissonier.*" The drawing of the Pariah's hut, minute as it is, is really beautiful: a quiet and cool interior with a sunny landscape of plaintains and palms revealed through the open door; and the Doctor's library is a paradise of books and papers, and what may be called "Meissonier" furniture and accessories. This microcosm is very typical of the painter's subsequent work, and from this his exhibited picture of "The Doctor" was suggested.[1] That the *sentiment* of Meissonier's work is not, and never was, in harmony with that predominant in French art, is a fact emphasized by his persistent avoidance of female subjects; and, as to its *humour*, when we see what French "humorous" art of the present day is, we may be permitted to regret that it ever supplanted his.

In 1840, in an official account, published by Curmer, of

[1] The edition of 1839 in which the above illustrations occur is not a rare book. A later edition of 1863 contains many of the same plates.

the transfer of the remains of the Emperor Napoleon I., from the island of St. Helena to Paris, two woodcuts from Meissonier illustrate the *Entrance into Havre*, and *The Quays at Rouen;* and during the years 1841 to 1843, he contributed regularly to a serial publication, also edited by Curmer, called "Les Français peints par eux mêmes: Encyclopédie morale du xix^e^. siècle." (Paris, L. Curmer, éditeur, 1841-1843.) Every one of his studies in this work will repay the trouble of referring to it, and the whole collection, in the great variety of subjects that it includes, is a striking evidence of the versatility of his genius. In the first volume (p. 333, "Le maitre d'études") we have a full-length figure of a schoolmaster; a man clumsily framed, and dressed with that combination of precision in style and slovenliness in detail, and expressing in his attitude and face that hard sort of weariness by which the inferior members of his profession are distinguished. The drawing is amazingly coloured, and is attributed in the index to Gavarni, but it is signed by Meissonier. In the second volume the story of "The Artist's Model" has a little vignette by Meissonier, of a poor little drudge of a girl, pathetically weary, posing, partly unclad, showing the thinness and feebleness of her form, in a constrained attitude to a fat, coarse painter, who seems himself half asleep over his work; and a head-piece (to "L'agent de change"), full of animation and incident, of the frantic Babel of shouting and gesticulations that goes on at the busiest period of the day round the ring in the centre of the Bourse. This little piece is crowded with figures of whom each has its independent character and action; and near it is another minute vignette representing the proud and sagacious stock-broker driving home in his gig. These drawings are free from exaggeration or forced humour, but far more lively and

comic in effect than the wildly drawn caricatures that were published in "Punch" and Dickens's works, and other serials in England at the same time.

"The Poet," in an attitude of painful expectation, trying to stare down a thought from the ceiling; the "Pecheur à la ligne," a broad and sunny view of the quays and barges on the Seine, and of the sleepy riverside life of the "Ile de Paris;" and the head-piece to the "Sportsman Parisien," a stable interior, very beautifully finished, follow in succession in the same volume, as though Meissonier had determined to run through the whole range of possible subjects for his pencil in the shortest possible time. The horses, in form and in the texture of their coats, approach perfection. There is a little ornamental O close by, representing the sportsman, "displayed" in a most natural attitude on the broad of his back, and his horse throwing up his heels as he plunges through the initial letter, which is very full of humour. In the third volume, published also in 1841, he illustrated the "Mendiants" with a figure of an old fiddler; and the "Amateur de livres" with another of an old bookworm; and in the fourth volume there is an initial vignette to "Les Pauvres," of a blind beggar, of the able-bodied, ruffianly sort, led by a delicate boy, which suggests his subsequent illustrations to "Lazarillo;" and a coloured full-length of an old-clothes dealer, which is smothered in the colouring.

This volume, however, contains two gems in illustration of "The Cobbler," called, in Parisian *argot*, "Le Gniaffe," a term of abuse, if we may judge from the quotation attached, "c'est lui M'sieu le Commissaire qui a k'mmencé par m'appeler *gniaffe*."

The first, a full-length coloured print, represents, we are told, not the servile and obsequious species, but the gniaffe

THE READER

pur sang, "au cœur noble, à l'ame elevée et ombrageuse, qui, en dépit de toutes les sirènes de la corruption, s'est maintenu dans l'indépendance la plus absolue et la plus primitive;" obviously a surly old republican, a lean man with gnarled and knotted hands and bunioned feet, and a truculent mouth and chin. The second figure is of the species *gorret*, which, we are told, is a derisive corruption of the word *correct*, applied in several trades to the chief of the journeymen apprentices—the *gorret* again being of two kinds, the pasting (à la pâte), and the cutting out *gorret*.

The *gorret à la pâte*, says the author, "whom we have selected for one of our types, and whom M. Meissonier, 'ce jeune peintre du plus bel avenir,' has reproduced with a remarkable truth to nature, belongs to a 'berloque de boueux," which is, in ordinary language, a bootmaker's shop." The sturdy old patriarch is represented, as he is described in the text, sitting at his "veilloire," or little square table, "surrounded," as Mr. Venus would say, "by the trophies of his art," sometimes singing and working, and beating time on the leather, letting his last word fall with the last blow of the hammer; or, at other times, discoursing gravely from the depth of his philosophy, as, for instance, "Our religion is absurd, and good for the people. The Protestant religion à la bonne heure! En voila une de religion! ils adorent un cochon, c'est vrai! mais c'est plus naturel!"

Another series of "Les Français" was issued at the same time, illustrating the provincial and foreign types of French subjects, and to this Meissonier contributed some remarkable drawings, of which the chief in interest are landscape and sea-pieces. For "Le Lutteur," in the first volume of this series, he drew a moonlight view of the ruins of the arena of the Roman amphitheatre at Nismes; on one side

the darkness of the shadow of the circular walls is interrupted by the moonlight streaming through the arched doorways and windows, and its irregular outline is contrasted against a bright but stormy sky above; on the opposite side, where the light falls full on the whiteness of the crumbling masonry, these apertures are so many black shadows, and the sky over this part is dark with driving clouds. In the interior of the deserted arena there is an expression of solitude and sleep; and in rising to the sky overhead the eye seems to escape out of an oppressive enclosure.

In the same volume is "Le Réligieux," a figure of a monk, described as a portrait of Dom François et Chartreux, in an attitude of submissive devotion, illustrating the motto, from the "Album de la Chartreuse":—

> "illis summa fuit gloria despici:
> illis divitiæ, pauperiem pati:
> illis summa voluptas,
> Longo supplicio mori."

"Le Capitaine de Commerce," in the same volume, is illustrated by Meissonier with a view of the entrance to the harbour at Havre. A fresh breeze is blowing, and a lively chopping sea is beating against the pier; a boat, crowded with men, is so microscopically finished that, in figures the size of a pin's head, the different actions of rowing and steering can be distinguished; and there is some wonderfully minute and accurate work among the tangled forest of masts and spars in the inner harbour, and truthfulness in the ship righting herself on her keel as she brails up or lowers her canvas, and comes under the lee of the buildings on entering the inner harbour. Then, anybody who knows Havre would recognize the picture as a portrait of the prettily crowded town and the hills beyond it.

In the second volume is a stately view of the broad river

and quays at Rouen, a study of Normandy pippins, and a sea-piece. Also a landscape (to "Le Foresien"), a view of Montbrison, Forez, a district remarkable for the smoke of its iron manufactories. Here, on a small engraving, we can see miles upon miles of level plain, extended under a murky sky, and bordered by mountains in the distance; churches, villages, chalets, smoking factories, and groves of poplars, indicate the middle plans; as you look, a black speck develops into a window, a few scratches above into a roof, a group of houses starts up, and village after village, with here and there a tall chimney vomiting smoke, carry the eye forward across the Lilliputian landscape towards the forest at the base of the mountain. In the third volume we are taken to Algeria; and Meissonier has drawn an Arab encampment, with camels as true to nature as those of Herr Gentz, in Ebers's "Egypt." This should have been an important drawing, but, as M. Burty very justly remarks, it has been *massacred* by the engraver. "It may be noticed, once for all," he adds, "that all the English engravers who have touched the woods of M. Meissonier, 'en ont retiré *la fleur*,' under their burin everything disappears; refinement of tone, harmony of design, spirit of detail."

Two little children's books, published about 1845, by Hetzel, were illustrated by Meissonier; an edition of the "Ile des Plaisirs," of Fénélon, and the "Story of a Doll and a Leaden Soldier," by P. Stahl. These little stories were republished in the "Nouveau Magasin des Enfants," Paris, Hachette, 1861. The illustrations have no importance at all.

In the following year a new edition of "Gil Blas" was preceded by an introduction by M. L. Viardot, and a translation of the story of "Lazarillo de Tormes," which was illustrated with nine small woodcuts in the text, and one

large cut apart, by Meissonier; the latter represents Lazarillo in his Spanish cloak, rapier at his side, and square hat. All of the cuts were engraved by Lavoignat, are very full of humour, and suggestive of the influence of Velazquez. The first shows Lazarillo, as a child, eating his mother's cakes. In the second, in his service of the blind man, he is leading his master abroad and begging for him; in the next the blind man is jealously holding a cup of wine with both hands, from which Lazarillo is sucking the contents through a straw; the fourth is a figure of the tinker who lends him a key for the strong box of his master, the priest, who is leaving him to starve of hunger; the next is the squire who, without a maravédi in his pocket, figures for a man of fashion; the next, the villainous monk, who gives Lazarillo his first pair of shoes, is said to be a copy from a painting of the same dimensions by Karel Dujardin. In the following sketch we have Lazarillo after his accession to fortune, when he is fitting himself out at the clothes-shop with the "costume d'un homme de bien,"—a doublet of faded plush, a well-worn cloak of cloth, and a sword of the period of the Cid. The series finishes with the entry of Lazarillo and his German friends of the suite of Charles V. into one of those cabarets which "they went into on their own legs, but left on those of other people." The last series of illustrations of this kind that require notice are those of the "Contes Rémois" and of the "Comedie Humáine" of Balzac, published in 1855; in the latter of which the freshness of humour remarkable in his former work has given place to a gloomy spirit of caustic satire, by no means so agreeable; indicating that perhaps it was all for the best that the master, now grown eminent as a painter, determined to relinquish this branch of his art to others.

I have mentioned, upon the authority of the master

himself, that M. Gautier and M. Claretie are both mistaken in assuming that the *Chess-Players* and the *Little Messenger*, in 1836,[1] were his first exhibited pictures; but that in 1833 or 1834 he exhibited the group described upon page 11. With reference to the dates of other works, there exists a similar uncertainty, increased by the repetition of favourite subjects, amongst which *Smokers*, *Readers*, *Chess-Players* and *Sentinels* abound; and the methodical compilation of his *œuvre* is a labour that could not be successfully undertaken without his own assistance. M. Claretie informs us in his pamphlet that, in the intervals of his painting, M. Meissonier is actually compiling a series of "Souvenirs."

Such a work, even apart from its art interest, will be strikingly interesting from the pen of one who has stood aloof, as Meissonier appears to have done, and observed, with the attention of an artist interested in the picturesque feature of events, the series of catastrophes and changes that his native country has gone through during his lifetime. The incidents which he has seized upon and illustrated are already prominent landmarks of such a history, and are obviously painted from a close study and familiar knowledge of their circumstances and the men engaged in them:—*Moreau and Dessoles*, on the eve of the battle of Hohenlinden; Napoleon in triumph, in "1807," and in defeat, in the *Retreat from Russia*, in 1814; the *Emperor at Solferino*, and the incident of the civil war at Paris, are the most prominent of these, and deserve to be studied in the first place by the student of the biography of Meissonier, to dissipate the common delusion that he could produce nothing but the celebrated *genre* subjects in the province of the "infiniment petits."

[1] In the catalogue *Les Joueurs d'echecs*, "sujet flamand," *Le Petit Messager*, idem—each of them sold at 100 francs!

CHAPTER II.

THE writer of the article in "The World" runs through the various stages of the criticism that has at different times been passed upon Meissonier's work. He is speaking of the allegorical subject which was designed at Poissy during the German occupation, and intended to be of colossal dimensions:—

> "The critics have hitherto said that Meissonier cannot distinguish himself on any canvas much larger than his thumb-nail. It is their last ditch, and that is no doubt what makes him so anxious to storm it. They have been talking in that way about him all along; and, one by one, he has confounded them by doing the very things they have said he could never attempt. His earlier style, and, as some think, his best, was a frank study of character and costume for its own sake. He painted pictures without any thought of a motive, for nothing but the delight of representing simple subjects with sincerity and force. The figures that then sat to his imagination were topers, chess-players, serenading cavaliers, bibliophiles ensconced in snug corners of seventeenth-century libraries, and so on. It was impossible to contest their supreme excellence in their own kind; so some few captious critics declared that, while he was unrivalled in this branch of art, he could never attain to the grand style. He could do studies; he would never do historic work. He replied by the *Diderot*, which, it is hardly too much to say, gives you the pictorial epitome of an epoch in its group of eager encyclopædists listening to a reading of the last new thing. Losing this position, his assailants took up another.

Most of his scenes were interiors, because here he found the best opportunity for the treatment of those minute accessories of costume and furniture in which he has such exquisite skill. So it struck them as an ingenious thing to say that he could do nothing but interiors, and that unless he had his subjects in a faint subdued light, he would be altogether lost. He said nothing, but quickly went to work and produced the *Portrait of the Sergeant*. Now the *Portrait of the Sergeant* is one of the most daring experiments in the painting of light, in modern art. The man stands out there in the open by himself, literally bathed in light, and he makes a perfect picture. There was one more charge to make; and somebody made it. He could paint history; he might even paint light; but he could not paint movement. (We are not now taking up these follies in their chronological order, but simply as they turn up in the memory.) He replied to this by painting the '*Rixe*.' How shall we translate it?—*The Tavern Row*—two picturesquely-attired ruffians, who have drawn on each other, and are straining in the hands of cooler-headed friends to fly together for a deadly embrace. We in England ought to know this picture, for we have the good fortune to possess it. It was Louis Napoleon's truly imperial gift to the Prince Consort. The '*Rixe*' finished Meissonier's series of triumphant demonstrations—at least it should have finished them; but, as we see, he is likely once more to be tempted out of his beaten path by the desire to prove that he can paint on a colossal scale. Let him beware: here he might find his Waterloo!"

His works in the Salon of 1839, which first arrested the attention of the general public, a long time before they attracted the notice of the critics, were *The Doctor* and the *Monk at the bedside of a Patient;* obviously inspired by the sentiment of Bernardin de St. Pierre, for whose *Paul and Virginia* he was drawing illustrations at the time. These works are (as M. Gautier points out) in no way connected with the so-called "Romantic" movement of his period; they are rather, as we should say, in the manner of Wilkie, of what Bulwer calls the "benevolent" school, and are remarkable for the expression of an intensity of *sympathy*

which has subsequently disappeared from Meissonier's work.

> "He had nothing in common with the Romantic movement, or the school of Delacroix, Decamps, Ary Scheffer, Dupré, Deverier, Boulanger, Roqueplan, and the rest; although the date of his appearance might seem to suggest this. His literary sympathies were with the 'École du bon sens,' he liked Ponsard and Augier, and he drew their portraits and the costumes described in their works, and put themselves into his Decameron of poets."

Of the same date is the first *Smoker* (*Homme fumant sa pipe*), and shortly later a *Buveur de bière;* the heralds of a long line of similar studies. The smokers are of two distinct types, of which we have a spirited description by M. Gautier: the first—

> "Placed well in the centre of the picture, sits with an elbow resting on the table, legs carelessly crossed, and a hand thrust into the folds of his waistcoat; his head throw dreamily back. The accessories *explain* him. He is dressed in a roomy coat of antique cut and modest grey colour, bonneted with a 'lampion' carefully brushed, and swings in the air a well-shod foot with a silver buckle on the instep. He exhales, with the calm of a good conscience, an immense 'bouffée' of smoke. His measure of beer is frothing at his side. 'Satisfaction intime' radiates from his honest face, wrinkled deeply with calculations and methodical habits of the strictest probity. This is an honest man to whom you would freely entrust your cash-box! The Other Smoker, dressed in scarlet, also has a pipe, and is acting in a similar manner, but his dress is disorderly and crumpled, and buttoned awry, his cocked hat is thrust down upon his forehead, his lace sleeves and his frill are plucked by his twitching fingers, the attitude of his body indicates trouble and excitement, the '*tic*' (crib-biting trick) of his lip chewing morsels of clay from his pipe-stem, the hand desperately (*rageusement*) plunging into an empty pocket, all betray the adventurer, the cleaned-out gambler. He is obviously reflecting 'where the deuce can I borrow me a louis, or a five-franc-piece?'

LA RIXE.

> "If we study the *locale* it tells the same story. We miss the precise grey panelling, the decent mahogany brown woodwork, and find in their place a wall that is dirty and covered with scratches, and marks of charcoal and grease proper to the obscure pothouse, and the 'taudis' of doubtful reputation."

The Salon of 1840 contained (says M. Claretie) *The Reader*, "since become famous;" an *Isaiah* and a *St. Paul* from his illustrations of the Bible of the Sieur Raymond.

In 1841 there was a typical study of *Chess-Players*, and in 1842 another *Fumeur*, and the *Player on the Violoncello*, which a friendly critic in the "Beaux Arts" declared to be worthy of Metsu and of Gerard Dou. With reference to the resemblance of Meissonier's work to that of the Dutch School of the 17th century, M. Ernest Chesneau ("La Peinture Française au XIXme Siècle") says:—

> "He only took the *sanction;* he was no *imitator* of the Dutch School of the 17th century. With great patience and energy he rivalled, in their own method, Terburg, Metzu, Gerard Dow, Mièris and Slingelandt; and beat them. . . . His minuteness of accuracy, which is attributed to him as a reproach, springs merely from the love of perfection, to be attained only by long and conscientious labour. . . . He is superior to Gerard Dow by his constant and careful study of *human expression*, &c."

The volume of the "Beaux Arts" for 1843 contains a woodcut from a design by Meissonier (engraved by Orrin Smith) of a religious piece, an *Adoration*, with a remarkable design of ornamentation on the frame. A collection of Meissonier's designs in decorative art would be valuable and interesting. As we have already mentioned, the edition of "Paul and Virginia," to which he contributed illustrations, abounds with the most beautiful specimens of his work in this branch.

His principal pictures for 1843 were the *Amateurs of*

Painting,[1] and *The Painter at his Easel*[2] (*Le Peintre dans son Atelier*), and a *Portrait d'homme*. The friendly critic of the "Beaux Arts" describes the former of these pictures as :—

> "A *chef d'œuvre* of six inches in size, at the most; twin-brother to the *Violoncello Player* and the *Chess-Players*—a painter of the last century—Greuze, perhaps—seated in his studio, which is hung with sketches, drawings, and finished pictures on the wall, in front of his canvas, and putting the finishing touch to a new work. His whole attention, mind and soul, are engrossed by his painting. Seated behind his chair are the two amateurs —the Paul Perrier and the Paturle, of 1765—watching his work." Of the *Portrait d'homme* the same writer says: "It makes us regret that the man who was happy enough to sit to such a painter, had not taste enough to induce a young lady to sit in his stead. We do not assert that this gentleman, with his grey trousers, his *embonpoint* 'plus que naissant,' his corpulence and his aged features, is absolutely disagreeable to look at; on the contrary, he has, for his friends, a frank and hearty expression, which tells of a life of happiness, and would beautify the ugliest features; but it is nevertheless certain that M. Meissonier would have been better pleased if his subject had been the smiling head of some beautiful child," &c.

Amongst the works noticed in the Salon of the year 1848 are a *Guard House;* a *Young Man looking at Drawings;* and a *Game of Piquet;* and, in 1849, the *Skittle-Players* (*La Partie des Boules*) which is regarded as a *chef d'œuvre*. M. Gautier describes the first of these, *La Garde Bourgeoise flamande*, as :—

> "A subject analogous to Rembrandt's celebrated *Sortie of the Banning Cock Company:* brave citizens, caparisoned in buff, armed with halberts, advance towards the spectator with a *debonnaire* awkwardness worthy of such soldiers. What an

[1] Sold at the Khalil Bey sale, in 1868, and bought by M. Léon Say, for £1,272.

[2] Sold at the Lehon sale, at Paris, in 1861, for 11,200 francs.

example is this of the infinite variety of art! That which Rembrandt overwhelms in fitful shadows, interspersed with reflected lights, Meissonier isolates, detaches, expresses with precision and detail; and each of them produces a masterpiece!"

In the Salon of 1852 were *Sunday*, and *An Incident of Civil War*,[1] by Meissonier. At this period the critics of the old school were thoroughly aroused on the subject of what the Comte de Viel-Castel, writing in the "Athenæum Français," calls "the invasion of the miniature" in every department of art.

> "The sentiment of grandeur," he says, "is lost to our epoch. Nowhere but in the Salons and the churches are there any broad walls fit to receive monumental works of painting and sculpture; and the artist, living in a contracted world, degrades his art to the proportions imposed by the mean necessities that he is subjected to. Some painters there are who still struggle to resist the invasion of the miniature—such as Glaize and Gallait. But the painters of *genre* and of marine subjects are daily wasting their talents upon little works which are assured of their sale. These artists are not required to wait for encouragement, they have *the public* who are their 'liste civile.' Under the pressure of circumstances art grows little, and in diminishing its proportions it loses its breadth, &c. M. Meissonier is an artist of great talent. M. Plassan and M. Fauvilet, his imitators, are refined and graceful, but they are founding a school which will be lost in a dry and minute *miniaturism*, and will give birth to 'imperceptible painters,' who will send to the exhibitions works in imitation of Van Blarenberg.
>
> "The school of Meissonier studies the arrangement of accessories, the texture of stuffs, &c., and a still-life to which 'la Nature vivante' is only introduced as a accessory."

The same critic writing on the Salon of the following year, 1853, which contained Rosa Bonheur's celebrated

[1] This last was subsequently exhibited, in 1863, at Brussels, and a writer in the "Chronique des Arts" alludes to it as having figured in the Salon of 1850-51.

Horse Fair, and Delacroix's most important work of the *Pilgrims of Emmaus*, painted in the manner of Rembrandt, and from Meissonier *A Man choosing a Sword*, a *Young Man Studying*, *The Bravos*, and the scene from the "Decameron" of Boccaccio (*à l'ombre des bosquets chante un jeune poète*):

> "A different school of *genre* painting is represented by Messieurs Fauvelet, Plassan, Fichel and Chavet. These four artists, at whose head is M. Meissonier, pass their lives contemplating nature through the small end of a telescope. Stuffs, gildings, interiors of rooms, play a principal part in their compositions, and they generally select the 18th century for their theatre." Of *The Young Man Reading*, he says, "The figure and accessories are treated more artistically; the fineness of detail has not impeded a certain breadth of the whole, and the light is well distributed."

The Bravos, which M. Gautier describes as one of the most important compositions of the master, containing a whole drama in two figures, was in the International Exhibitions of Paris in 1855 and of London in 1862. It represents two murderers, in an attitude of strained suspense, waiting for their victim to emerge from a door in front of them. It was exhibited in the collection of Sir Richard Wallace, at the Bethnal Green Museum, in 1872. I have before me the photograph of a *Chess-Players*, signed and dated 1853. It represents an elaborately-wrought interior of an artist's studio, richly furnished, but in great disorder and uncarpeted; a large picture on an easel seems to be falling forward and supported by the richly-brocaded arm-chair of one of the players; the dress of this figure, and the chair coverings, are elaborately worked with flowered designs. An ecclesiastic, with one of those thick long clay pipes of France which are such singularly disagreeable smoking, seems to be claiming a victory in the game. A fine Scotch deerhound is peacefully slumbering on the

boarded floor. The general effect is one of great richness and profusion of ornament, which does not, however, divert the attention from the central action admirably conveyed in the attitudes and expression of the players.

The panel picture from the "Decameron" is important among Meissonier's works, from the circumstance of its containing a number of female figures. It is quite in the manner of Watteau. It represents four or five ladies listening to the recitation of a poet, who, on a bench in the background, is reciting his verses to the accompaniment of a guitar. A loving couple are wandering in an affectionate posture to the shadows of the wood. In the foreground some fruits diaper a table of white marble with their velvety colours. Some noble specimens of dogs are introduced. The whole picture is most beautifully delicate and refined, and, free from the mannerism of Watteau, rivals in all other respects his best productions of the kind.

Another important picture of this year was *Moreau et Dessoles—M. et son chef d'état D. avant Hohenlinden*, representing a bleak and desolate snow-covered landscape, the clearing of a forest, on a high hill. The two generals have advanced to the edge of a precipice, and are surveying the field of battle with a glass. Two sergeants mounted hold the horses at a short distance; the trees are bending under a strong gale of wind, the horses turn their tails towards the wind, the cloaks of the generals are fluttering before them like flags, and one feels alarmed lest they should be carried over the cliff. This painting is an admirable example of Meissonier's power in the treatment of atmospheric effects, and of imparting to a landscape a sentiment harmonizing with and intensifying that of his subject.

A critic in the "Athenæum Français," writing in 1854, says:—

> "Many talented artists since 1836" (obviously the year of Meissonier's introduction) "have been ruined by their connection with literary men, inspiring their work from books and poems rather than from the traditions of their art. They have grouped themselves under a representative master, in imitation of the poetical and literary movement of the period. The last traces of this epidemic remain in certain bizarre groups; *e.g.* the Sect of the Regenerated Antique, or the pagans of colour; a sort of 'école de bon sens' of painting; the party of the 'Chatoyants,' honest people, who conceive they have done everything when they have represented the trailing of a silk robe upon marble stairs, and to whom a plumed imbecile playing a guitar, while he dips his feet in a *vasque*, is the height of the picturesque; the *nichée* of the *infinitely little, headed by M. Meissonier.*"

The writer is M. Charles Asselineau; and a very similar strain of criticism is adopted by a "foreign correspondent" to the "Athenæum" of about this date (March 24, 1855), who, after deprecating with considerable discretion and judgment, in a general way, the rage for novelty that is chronic in France, unfortunately falls foul of M. Meissonier:

> "'I can't be original in cookery (*en cuisine*): I will be so in carpentry,' soliloquises M. Meissonier, who has founded what may be called the Infinitesimal School. 'I will make the smallest panels that ever were made. I will paint the Days of June—the whole of that terrible and sombre scene—soldiers and insurgents, streets blocked up, barricades stormed and bloody—all on a surface not larger than my hand.' Is not this original—very original? Down comes the amateur with his money; up goes the *Io pæan* of criticism!"

But the *Io pæan of criticism* had yet to be heard, and M. Meissonier was making his method prevail in the teeth of adverse criticism. We shall very soon now have the pleasure of recording a period of unanimous tergiversation in this respect; and, to make that pleasure the greater, it is worth while, at the risk of tedious iteration, to put first

upon record a final protest, in the "Athenæum Français," made by the Comte de Viel-Chastel, on the occasion of the collection of the works of Meissonier, and his now firmly-founded "School," at the Universal Exhibition of 1855. After a very scholarly allusion to the manner in which the Fine Arts, "the hieroglyphic poetry of their period," pass the same changes and vicissitudes, and have their periods of decadence and renaissance together, with poetry:—

> "Now," he says, "they renounce the idealization of matter, after having renounced the idealization of thought, and sacrifice to painted and carved records of material facts: they flatter the passions of the mob whom they court, and condemn the pencil and the chisel to the *unintelligent* reproduction of all that the artist can see." (I have put the "words of prejudice" in appropriate italics.) Alluding to the renaissance of the Christian School in Germany—"Not produced by *vulgar* admiration of *brutal* reality, but rather by exaggerating the idea, the dream, at the expense of the form; of the poetry, at the cost of the execution," he calls the contrary tendency now exhibited in the French School, "a new theory destructive of all art, by the exorbitant pretension of liberating it from *every* rule, from *every* idealization. The Exposition Universelle finds the new school of the Trivial rising up on the field of battle, protesting, by its tendencies and its works, against all the illustrations of modern art: denying art, genius, inspiration, poesy to hold to an impossible 'calque' of Reality."

There is no doubt that the Count was a representative critic; or that the followers of Overbeck (who boasted that he *never* used a model) had no place in their minds for Meissonier.

M. Meissonier elected to be represented at the Universal Exhibition by four small panel paintings, *La Rixe*, the *Bravos*, *La Lecture chez Diderot*, and the *Skittle Players (Joueurs de Boule sous Louis XV.)*, all of which have been already alluded to.

I will, however, insert here an interesting description of the *Diderot* picture, from the pen of Mr. Charles Blanc. It appeared in a feuilleton of the "Temps," in 1867.

> "On a canvas of a few centimètres, he presents us with a whole group of philosophers of the seventeenth century; amongst whom we seem to recognize Baron Holbach, Grimm, D'Alembert, and Diderot himself, with his friendly figure, his eye so prompt to brighten with the fire of genius. In the attitudes and expressions of the reader and his hearers, the degree of attention is marked in each. Diderot stands in the foreground, leaning upon a chair which he is balancing to and fro; another is bending over a manuscript and eagerly attentive; a third, in an abstracted mood, has thrown himself back in his chair, putting his little finger into his ear; a fourth, behind the table, is leaning against the library shelves, and the different bindings are distinguished, some of them faded and worn, and a row of small volumes, bound in red, with white labels, yellow with use.

The criticisms of M. Edmond About are always lively and independent, but representative of a high order of thought. He says:[1]—

> "Since the Salon of 1852, M. Meissonier, although he has by no means abandoned his pleasure in 'tours de force,' has shown that he is not alarmed at a larger canvas, and was not lost in the middle of a vaster frame. The same perfection of finish that formed the charm of the smaller pictures was found in *The Rixe* and *The Bravos*, with the addition of vigour and energy, I had almost written of *rage*. His talent has grown with his pictures, and if he is always to progress in this proportion, I would advise M. Meissonier to borrow a great canvas from M. Horace Vernet, or from M. Diaz . . . *hélas!* To cover M. Meissonier's pictures with gold pieces simply, would be to buy them for nothing; and the practice has now been established of covering them with bank notes. Messieurs Chavet, Fauvelet,

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[1] "Voyage à travers l'Exposition des Beaux Arts, 1855." Edmond About.

Plassan and Andrieux follow 'spiritually' the manner of M. Meissonier. Their pictures do not sell badly, and in a short time no others will be saleable, for life is drawing in its limits, and apartments are growing smaller every day. M. Pezous is a Meissonier on a smaller footing, with a great deal less in his drawing and a little more in his colour."

In the Salon of 1857 we find the *Confidence*, *A Painter*, *A Man in Armour*, *An Amateur of Pictures in the Studio of a Painter*.[1] The first of these, which M. Gautier apostrophizes as "a pearl and a marvel among pictures," is one of those dramatic efforts in which, as in the *Bravos*, an incident of romantic interest is narrated thoroughly, by sheer force of expression, in a most simple and obvious method. It represents a young man, "*L' Amoureux candide*," foolishly and exuberantly confiding the secrets of his heart to a hardened *roué*, middle aged, who is plainly bored by the confidence. There is more than talent, there is a great deal of *pathos* in the picture, to those who have not lost their sympathy in the generous illusions of youth.

Of the same year, 1857, is the *Drapeau*, a finely-posed figure of a young man, in armour to the thighs, supporting the immense folds of a standard. He has a classic head and short curled hair and beard, and the whole form would bear comparison with any productions of the school of the idealized "antique." The picture was in the Demidoff sale, in 1862, and is described in the "Chronique des Arts" of that date.

The *Amateur of Pictures*—a blonde young man, in black breeches, white waistcoat, and coat of rose-coloured taffeta, examining a drawing from a portfolio on a chair—was

[1] The official catalogue gives also *L'attente; Un homme à sa fenêtre; Jeune homme du temps de la Régence; Portrait d'Alexandre Batta; Joueurs d'échecs* (*dessin*).

originally in the Morny Gallery, and was sold at a sale in Paris, in 1863, for 9,400 francs. The *Man in Armour* of 1857, an upright figure, helmeted, cuirassed, with yellow sleeves, grey breeches, and red stockings, the left hand on the guard of his rapier, and holding a lance in the other, was sold in Paris at an auction held in December 1861, for

LE FAUCON.
From the "Contes Rémois."

9,000 francs. A *Harquebusier*, in grey buff, red stockings, felt cap, upright, shouldering his weapon, also of 1857, was sold in January 1862, for 6,100 francs. A picture of 1858, *Soldiers at Cards*,[1] 27 by 21 centimetres (the Demidoff one),

[1] Sold by the artist for £1,000, and, at the Wertheimber sale, bought by M. Demidoff for 28,000 francs. Sold at New York, in 1876, for 11,500 dollars.

representing a band of "Reiters," in the great hall of a fortress, has a likeness to the works of our English Cattermole.

A critic, dissatisfied with it—it is curiously divergent from Meissonier's usual *finesse* of style,—says: "M. Meissonier has accustomed us to more freshness in the shadows, more air in the background, more freedom in the composition, and especially to less *vulgarity* (*banalité*) in the choice of subject and sentiment." In effect it is a typical work, representative of a side not sufficiently illustrated of Meissonier's versatile genius. It reminds us of the work of Rembrandt, and there is something quite remarkable in the manner in which the lights and shadows are utilized to heighten the facial expression of the figures. The features of the loser, who sits with his back to the light, appear *en silhouette*, while the bland mockery of his smiling opponent is placed opposite to a strong light. On the back of the mount of the photograph of this picture before me, M. Meissonier has written: "ce tableau a été fait pour Lord Hertford en 1858."

About this period M. Meissonier was much noticed by the Emperor, and we read in the "Gazette des Beaux Arts," of September 1859, that he was at that time just finishing the sketch of *The Battle of Solferino;* and had received a commission for another historical picture of the meeting of the two Emperors of France and Austria, on horseback; and was about to *return* to Italy to take the sketch on the precise spot where this historic incident occurred, and to proceed from thence to Vienna to take the portrait of the young Emperor.

In January, 1860, a very remarkable exhibition was held on the Boulevard des Italiens, of modern works of art lent by private collectors, for the benefit of the Caisse des Secours, or Artists' Benevolent Fund; "which," says M.

Gautier, "did not contain *one* bad or *mediocre* picture." Here the progress of the "Romantic School," created in Meissonier's early days, was represented in an interesting collection of examples of various epochs: of Bonnington, Delacroix, Décamps, Jules Dupré, Theodore Rousseau, Boulanger, Isabey, Robert Fleury, Camille Roqueplan, Diaz, Riesener, and others; whose works, remarkable for brilliance and intensity of colour, seemed to clothe the walls with a glowing and luxurious tapestry, and contrasted strongly with the cold, pale colours for which the annual exhibitions at the Palais de l'Industrie had been remarkable. Other leading masters of the French School represented at this Exhibition, were: Ingres, Hipp. Flandrin, Meissonier, Gudin, Troyon, Rosa Bonheur, Brascassat, Isabey, Ary Scheffer, Marilhat, Charlet, &c.

> "Never," says M. Gautier, "was the work of Meissonier more favourably represented: he is there in every shade of his genius, and with the most curious variations of style. The little world of his creation is increased with new and welcome inhabitants. Signor *Polichinello* makes his entrance among the studious and sedate amateurs, painters, smokers, beer-drinkers, violoncellists, and others. Besides the *Decameron* we have there the *Nephew of Rameau*, one of those drinkers, 'qui jettent la bouteille après le premier verre; qui cassent une pipe après avoir fumé,'" &c.

There were several repetitions of the *Polichinello*. I have before me a photograph of one, a specimen of animated wood or wooden humanity, bedizened in satins and embroidery, with immense bows of ribands at the knees; a thing half man and half doll, sprawling on futile legs, and obviously pendent from the back of his neck; his hands are clasped over his ridiculous stomach, his club is hugged under his arm, and he cocks his head, surmounted by a tall fool's cap, at an angle, and grins at the spectator with a pucker in the left eye in the highest degree ludicrous. On

the back of this photograph M. Meissonier has attached a pencil memorandum in his own writing:—"Ce tableau a été peint par plaisanterie sur une porte. La peinture a été coupée à la vente de la personne qui possédait la porte. Sir R. Wallace l'a achetée." This is the *Polichinel on panel*, which figured as the number 521 of the works exhibited at Bethnal Green in 1872. Another *Polichinello* (if not the same) is mentioned in a sale of the modern pictures belonging to M. Alexandre Dumas fils, in 1865, where it was bought for £280.

M. Meissonier had always a habit of occupying himself in drawing upon any material that lay at hand in his moments of enforced inaction; and M. Claretie mentions a publisher with whom he had dealings in his youth, who made a practice of keeping him waiting in an ante-room in which the table was supplied with pencils and strips of paper, which M. Meissonier regularly covered for him, without noticing what he was doing, with valuable sketches which the ingenious publisher as regularly converted into money.

The *Nephew of Rameau* mentioned by M. Gautier is a production of the year 1860; it represents merely "a man at a table smoking a pipe," but it is an immortal character-sketch worthy of Velazquez himself. It is the typical vagabond, or OTHER SMOKER, described by M. Gautier (see page 26).[1] Among the most amusing of the critiques evoked by the Exhibition in 1860, is that of M. Cordier, in the "Beaux Arts," who is humorous on the subject of Meissonier's selection of a period in the past century, and prophesies that in the future:—

> "Genius, never satisfied with the present, will find its subjects in memories of 1860, which will render it dissatisfied with 1960,

[1] See "Gazette des Beaux Arts," Feb. 1860.

which, in its turn, will be envied by 2060, and so on *ad infinitum*. Our ghosts, one day returning to an Exhibition of the next century, will be singularly flattered to read on the labels of pictures *two or three inches in diameter* such inscriptions as 'A Critic composing an Article for a Review,' 'A Young Man mixing his Absinthe,' or 'A Lecture *chez* Alexandre Dumas.'"

Carrying out the comparison of Meissonier with Watteau, suggested by the *Decameron* subject in this Exhibition, he goes on to say: "M. Meissonier has not selected the pleasant and lively features of the age of Louis Quinze; he takes no delight in those delicious butterfly scenes of bright colours gaily glittering in the sun, voluminous silks falling in a thousand pleats and shining like the facets of a diamond. The false but elegant life, of which Watteau painted the pleasures, with its 'grandes dames coquettes, filles rieuses," and young lords glittering with gold: all that 'cohue fanfreluchonnée' has been far from his mind; he has seized upon one idea, to represent the minute details of real life in its working aspect. He is not the painter of the *fêtes galantes*, but of the life of labour, of the life which existed with, and finally overwhelmed, the festive existence of last century. He is not to be seduced by rouge and patches; philosophers and artists are his subjects, men elaborating thought in the silence of labour."

It will now be observed that thoughtful writers began to regard the message of Meissonier as something secularly significant,—beyond the mere accident of a change of fashion and tendency of art,—representative of a wave of progress in the civilization of the nation.

M. Chesneau, also a thoughtful writer, dealing with the subject from this point of view, shows how the Romantic School represented by Delacroix was too earnest, too frankly sentimental, for the character of the nation, and speaks of the realism of the Dutch School, represented by Courbet, as a transition between what he calls the *heroic* and the *human* periods of French art.

"France, from geographical position and the character of her people, always vacillating between the North and the South, has had her *heroic* period with Poussin, Lesueur, Lebrun,

THE FLEMISH SMOKER.

> David, Ingres, and even with her last great artist, Eugène Delacroix, whose genius was but a variation of the ancient classical tradition. Twice or thrice her art has struggled to enter into the *human* period, and has failed to do so, in spite of the efforts of the brothers Lenain, of Chardin, and of Géricault. To Courbet is to be attributed the continuation of these efforts," &c;—

And their triumph to Meissonier, whose work combining artistic with so-called literary excellence, completely overshadows such productions as the *Demoiselles de Village*, and the *Casseurs de Pierres*, of Courbet.

M. Chesneau makes the happy remark, that whereas there is breadth and grandeur in Meissonier's smallest panels, David and his school had the art of imparting *littleness* to (*rappetisant*) canvases of the greatest dimensions. He points out that the work of David was always cramped by the shackles of tradition and heartless conventionality, and that of Meissonier, elaborated in search of an ideal perfection by long and conscientious labour,

> "Evidences a superhuman patience, an unconquerable longing to do well, a persistence and continuity of purpose in his mind, most rare in themselves, and in him happily combined with a constant study of the expression of feeling in humanity, and especially of the refinements of the intellect (*esprit*). Thought, meditation, serious or wandering, of the philosopher or of the lover, have supplied him with motives for the most charming, often pathetic, compositions. He can express in his art the sensual satisfaction of the musician, and the naïve indications of foolishness (as in *The Confidence*)," &c.

The official catalogue of the Salon of 1861 mentions *The Emperor at Solferino; un maréchal ferrant; un musicien; un peintre; Portrait de M. Louis Fould; Portrait de Madame T—*.[1] The *Solferino* was not however ready. At

[1] Madame Henri Thénard. It was one of Meissonier's fourteen pictures in the Universal Exhibition, 1867 (see page 42).

the private view a jealous critic, M. Lamquet, expecting that it would be admitted by favour after the appointed term, cries:—

> "At the moment we are writing this article, M. Meissonier's picture has not arrived. Why this favour refused to so many others? If a little more time was to be granted to any, it should have been to those whose reputation was still to make."

M. Jules Claretie speaks in enthusiastic terms of Meissonier's excellence as a portrait painter "pénétrant et vivant;" and makes this excellence an answer to such criticisms as that of M. Cordier (see page 39), objecting to his choice of a period in the past century, "when Meissonier paints modern and contemporary persons," he says, "il est plus contemporain et plus moderne que personne." The portrait of Mdme. Henri Thénard is also adduced, as an additional instance, confirming that of the *Decameron* and his illustration work, of his excellence in painting women.

> "What pretty rose tints beaming with life and truth! What a study of drawing and painting that hand veined with blue! what a charm, touched with melancholy, in the features! And when the beautiful *Titianesque* girl that he is finishing shall be exhibited, it will be seen what a painter of women is this man, who designed the exquisite and seductive figures in the 'Contes Rémois' of M. de Chevigné.
>
> "The *Portrait of M. Delahante*, among many others that he has signed—such as those of his son, of M. Fould, of M. Battu, and others—is one of the most '*solides*.' The man is powerful, of athletic build; but there is a touch of refinement still in this 'taille de colosse.' He luxuriates more in vitality than in 'embonpoint.' The head is full of energy and a latent gaiety."

This *Portrait of M. Delahante* was one of the works by which Meissonier was represented in the Exhibition of 1867. In the background of the picture was a miniature reproduction of the *Charge of Cuirassiers at Friedland*, in the picture called "1807" (described on page 54).

Of the works of the year 1861, there is another *Card Party*, the figures of which might be taken for English cavaliers of the civil wars, distinguished by long hair, flapping boots with great spurs, slovenly costume, and a character of free-hearted, reckless gaiety. Each of these figures is a remarkable study in itself of the expression of character and emotion, not in the features alone, but in all the details of attitude, costume, and, in short, individuality. A contrast to this roystering scene is *The Audience* (engraved for the "Gazette des Beaux Arts," 1861, by Ch. Carey, a pupil of Tony Johannot), illustrating the polished punctilio of an official reception; and a third, totally different subject of the same date is *The Blacksmith* (*Le Maréchal ferrant*) drawn from Meissonier's illustration to the "Contes Rémois," a scene of humble life, in the open air; a blacksmith shoeing a patient old cart-horse—(Meissonier's horses are simply perfect for anatomy, expression, and *texture* of their coats)—in a picturesque corner of a yard, where vines clamber about a trellis overhead, and soften the light with their green and partial shade. It was one of the pictures exhibited in London in 1862.

The "Beaux Arts" (not the Gazette), formerly, as we have seen, so friendly, was very severe upon Meissonier in the criticisms of the Salon of 1861—and says of this picture:—

> "This is one of the *infiniment petits;* with much pains we have discovered in it, great skill in the composition, great refinement (*finesse*) in the details, but not the least kind of perspective;" and of *The Musician*; "he is well posed and is handling his instrument with ease; which must be all the more difficult for him to do, because the floor is on a slope, like that of a gothic roof, and he is in danger of slipping down it and breaking his neck: the pieces of furniture charmed with his melody are all dancing on different legs; 'mais Amphion en a

bien fait d'autres!' There is less perspective in this picture than the other."

M. P. Buchère, to whom we owe this criticism, was engaged at the time in a series of articles in the same journal upon the subject of *Chinese Art*, which may have complicated his study of the Laws of Perspective.

Towards the end of 1861 Meissonier was elected to the Academy, in place of M. Abel de Pujol. This honour was contested by M. Auguste Hesse, a former holder of the "Prix de Rome." The "Chronique des Arts," December 8, 1861, makes a curious allusion to this election, as though the specialists were not yet reconciled to the popularity of M. Meissonier, won without their help :—

> "However great the talents of M. Hesse, he is not nearly so *well known* as his competitor, and it must be admitted that a great *notoriety* is, in itself, a motive for preference. According to the list drawn up by the Section for Painting, it is evident that the majority of votes obtained by M. Meissonier, were given to him by the Sections of Architecture, Engraving, and Music; that is to say, by those who, being unconnected with painting, represent *public opinion:* the sentiment of the world at large."

M. Ernest Chesneau comments upon the circumstance, as fortunate, that Meissonier was not called upon to pronounce an eulogy upon his predecessor in the academical chair, who differed, in his views of art, *toto cœlo*, from himself; and had "adopted and diverted towards religious painting the narrow tradition and cold conventionality of David."

Extracted from the official catalogue of the English International Exhibition, 1862 are

187. The Student.	le Comte de Morny.
188. Breakfast.	
189. H.M. the Emperor at the Battle of Solferino (*not sent*).	H.M. the Emperor of the French.
190. H.M. the Emperor Napoleon I.	H.I.H. Prince Napoléon.
191. The Bravos.	le Comte de Morny.

Mr. F. T. Palgrave says in his remarks introductory to the official catalogue of the French School, that

> "England possesses, in the domestic branch of subjects, no painter equal in truth and tenderness of feeling to Edouard Frère. His works, with those of Plassan, Trayer, Troyon, and others, display another excellent national quality; tact and ease in telling the story, and a determination not to exceed the limits of the style adopted by the artist."

But he does not mention Meissonier.

At the exhibition of the "Cercle de l'Union Artistique," held in the Rue de Choiseul in 1862, Meissonier was represented by the *Corps de Garde*, the *Lecture chez Diderot*, already mentioned, and another picture called *Le Capitaine*, representing a veteran officer in military costume of the 17th century, descending a baronial staircase, with an air of mingled familiarity and swagger in the highest degree humorous. An article in the "Chronique des Arts," May, 1863, adds that to these were subsequently added a copy of the *Napoleon during the Campaign of France*, the property of Prince Napoleon; which was painted "en camaieu gris," and sold to M. Delahante for the price of £1,000.

The "Gazette des Beaux Arts" of this year (1862) contains a very good etching by Flameng of a picture, then just completed, *La Halte*, and an able commentary upon it by M. Léon Lagrange:—

> "This is such a picture as we would fain have more frequently from M. Meissonier. Each figure, man or beast, has its own very remarkable individual value; and all combine in one common action composing an animated scene. The necessity of grouping together a number of living figures has stimulated the efforts of the painter in search of expression; and the necessity of binding a variety of tones has stimulated his study of colour. The white horse is mounted by a man dressed in blue; the bay, by a man in green; the black, by a rider in

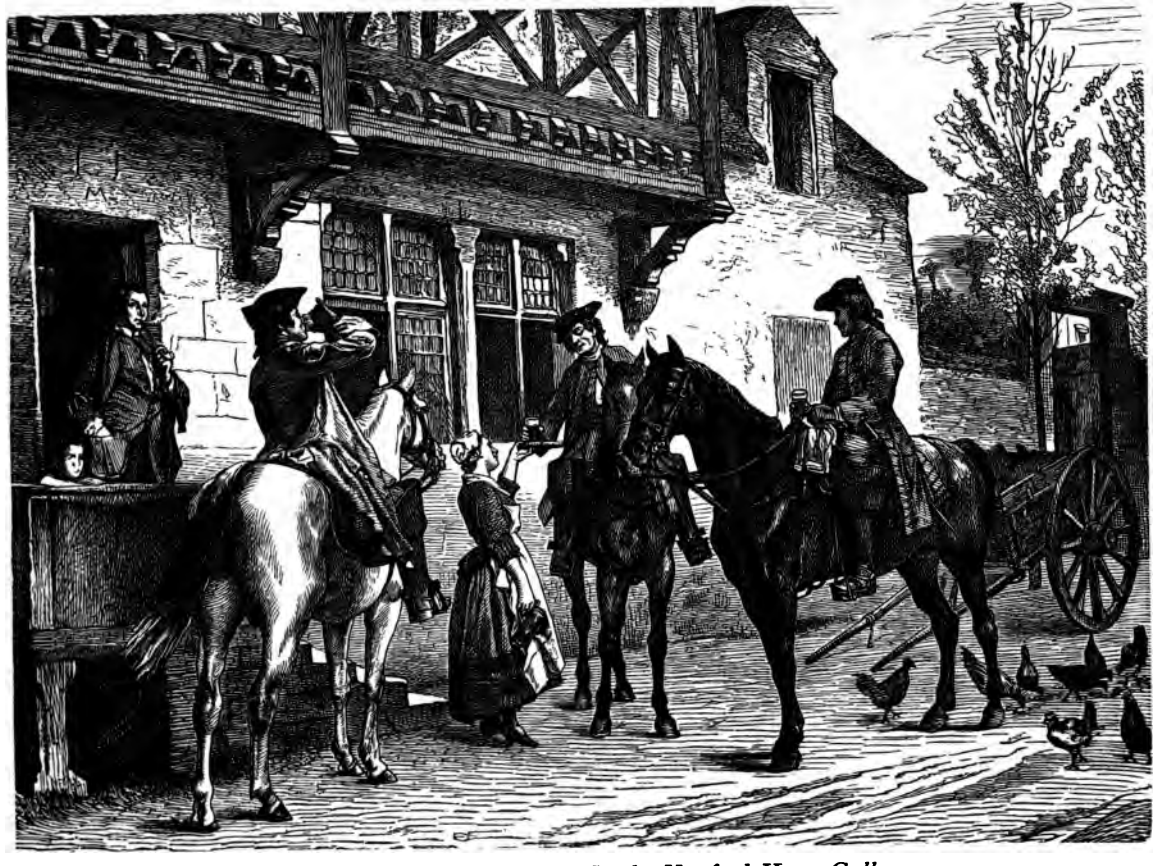
> red. The red roof of the inn, the dress of the man smoking, the grey robe of the woman, the white linen, the poultry, the walls, the trees, are so many separate notes mingling through light demi-tints to a harmonious *ensemble.*"

This picture was painted for the Duc de Morny. On the photograph of this picture M. Meissonier has written the following interesting note: "Ce tableau a été acheté primitivement par M. de Morny, qui quelque temps après l'avoir acquis m'a prié de l'agrandir: pour lui être agréable j'ai fait ajouter du bois au panneau. Il a du être acheté à la vente du Duc par Lord Hertford." It was exhibited at Bethnal Green, under the title of *Travellers halting at an Inn.* It has the French alias of *L'Auberge.*

In 1863, on 19th April, a notice in the "Chronique des Arts," informs us that M. Meissonier had "that moment" finished the *Battle of Solferino.* In the same journal it is recorded, in July, 1863, that this picture, although it was inserted in the Catalogues of the Salons of 1861 and 1863, and in that of the English International Exhibition of 1862, had *not appeared at either.* It was, however, at that date, 1863, on view in the studio of M. Bingham. It was exhibited in the Salon of 1864, and the International Exhibition of 1867, and is now in the Luxembourg Gallery.

It was one of the pictures by which Meissonier was represented at the Brussels Exhibition of this year. The others were the *Souvenir of the Civil War*, 1850-51, and the *Young Man reading near a Window*, which had been sold at the Le Hon sale of 1862. Both of these last-named pictures were at that time the property of Mr. Van Praet. The last must be the picture originally christened the *Bibliophile*, a picture described by M. Gautier—

> "Of Meissonier's golden age, of Louis Quinze, when men wore full curled wigs, or powdered hair drawn back, giving every-



THE HALT. BY MEISSONIER. *In the Hertford House Gallery.*

one a disguised air and appearance of being made up and middle-aged.

"The young man turns his head towards his book; the daylight is fading, and the grey of the evening is seen in the sky outside, the shutter being partially closed."

In 1861, Meissonier made the illustrations to a new edition of the "Contes Rémois," by the Comte de Chevigné, of which there is a friendly notice, illustrated with cuts, in M. Piot's "Cabinet de l'Amateur." M. Piot informs us that the Comte de Chevigné secured the co-operation of Meissonier at a lavish price, and ensured the success of his publication by doing so. Of the illustrations, specimens of which will be found at pages 36, 49, 61, 69, &c., M. Piot says:—

"*La Culotte des Cordeliers* and *Le Mari Matinal* carry our memory back to the pretty etching of *The Smoker*, made for the first number of our 'Cabinet de l'Amateur,' now twenty-two years ago; and looking at *Le Bon Docteur* and the *Cinq Layettes*, we are again in his society of *Philosophers* and *Chess-Players*, whose honest faces redeem the character of the calumniated eighteenth century; and was it not yesterday that English and French buyers were contending at the Hotel Drouot for possession of the persons of the *Gros Dogue*, *De par le Roi*, or the *Falcon?*"

Le Bon Cousin is the original idea of the picture of *Le Maréchal ferrant*, of 1861 (described on page 43). *La Culotte des Cordeliers* is given on page 69, and *Le Bon Docteur* on page 49 of this work. *De par le Roi* was a characteristic scene of a company of Harquebusiers knocking at the low vaulted door of a mediæval house. Other fine illustrations in the "Contes Rémois" were *Le Mari Borgne*, a crowded scene of a wedding-party emerging from the church, where doubtless the ceremony had just been completed; *Le Mari Matinal*, an enthusiastic amateur gardener, digging in

an open flower-garden, with a gabled mansion in the background; and *Le Pélérinage*, a landscape scene in a finely timbered park, with two female figures of peasant girls.

The year 1863 was marked by the death of the great leader of the Romantic School of painting, Eugène Delacroix. He died on the 13th August, at the age of sixty-four. He made his *début* in art, in 1822, with a masterpiece, the *Barque of Dante*, and exercised probably more influence on the course of the art of his country than any other living painter of his time.[1] M. Jules Claretie tells us that "the painter whom this impassioned (*fougueux*) and vast genius loved and admired above all others, was Meissonier. 'Meissonier,' said the author of the *Massacre de Scio* one day, 'est le maître le plus incontestable de notre époque.'"

We are indebted to M. Claretie for an account of the following incident:—Another *Souvenir of the Civil War*, called *La Barricade*, was standing in M. Meissonier's studio one evening that Eugène Delacroix had dined with him. "C'est superbe!" s'écria l'auteur de la *Barque du Dante*. "Vous trouvez? Eh bien, dit Meissonier, si cela vous plait, prenez-le!" and Delacroix carried home the *Barricade*.

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[1] Ferdinand Victor Eugène Delacroix was born at Charenton, in 1799; his father had been minister during the Directory, but he was left very poor; he studied under Guérin, and soon became a chief leader of the Romantic (or Anti-classic) school [see page 26]. In 1822 he exhibited the celebrated scene from Dante's "Inferno," now in the Luxembourg Gallery; in 1834 decorated the Chamber of Deputies with allegoric figures, and exhibited the *Battle of Taillebourg*, now at Versailles; in 1848 he decorated the Chamber of Peers; his paintings are very numerous.—(*C. C. Black.*) Those exhibited to the British public at Bethnal Green, in 1872, by Sir Richard Wallace, are well-chosen specimens of his power in pathos and expression, the *Death of Marino Faliero* and *Faust and Mephistopheles*.

At the Delacroix sale[1] it was bought, for 3,600 francs, by M. Steinhell, the brother-in-law of M. Meissonier, who offered it at the same price to M. Reiset, for the Louvre. M. Reiset, after some hesitation, declined, and M. Steinhell subsequently re-sold the picture for 6,000 francs. M. Claretie adds that the picture was never exhibited excepting

LE BON DOCTEUR.
From the "Contes Rémois."

at the Delacroix sale; it cannot therefore be the same *Souvenir of the Civil War* that figured at Brussels in 1862. The frank interchange of gifts of such value is characteristic of the friendship that existed between the two great masters.

[1] The catalogue of this Sale is one of the valuable collection of Art Sale Catalogues in the Art Library at the South Kensington Museum.

In the "Cabinet de l'Amateur" of 1863, M. Eugène Piot remarks:—

> "The much-affected crowd of artists who thronged to the obsequies of M. Eugène Delacroix, saw with pain that no official recognition was added to this public mourning. Let us close up our ranks ('serrons-nous') around our illustrious dead; let us study to make their funeral honours worthy of France and their own genius! Indifference gains upon us on every hand, and every day narrows the fatal circle within which French art is perishing (ce cercle fatal ou l'art français agonise et se meurt)."

The Salon of 1864 contained the two greatest of Meissonier's series of eight pictures, illustrating the "Napoleonic cycle" (as M. Claretie calls it); from the defeat of the Austrians at Lodi in 1796, to the retreat from Russia, or the campaign of France, in 1814.

With reference to the refusal of the jurors to award the medal to Meissonier on this occasion, M. Edmond About says (*Salon de* 1864):—

> "The painters have been more naïvely *personal*, if one may say so, in their decision than even the sculptors. Not having a single deceased member to reward; fearing beyond anything else to do justice to Meissonier, who has exhibited two masterpieces, or to two or three other eminent artists such as Jules Breton and Amaury Duval, they have had the heroism and the egotism to declare that there would be no 'Grande Médaille' awarded. And for fear that public opinion would force their hand at the end of a fortnight's exhibition, they juggled away the medal of honour on the 6th of May, six days after the opening. . . . Two admiring groups, incessantly renewed from the time of opening the doors until the closing, indicate the places where Meissonier's two pictures are hung. And it is to these two pictures that the jury has refused the Grande Médaille! It was awarded to M. Yvon some years ago. And Meissonier has not had it. Oh Frenchmen of Paris! Athenians of the La Villette suburbs! You do not deserve great

artists, as you do not know how to reward them! . . . . . We had *five* painters in the year of the Exhibition of 1855, who held in their sphere the rank held by Scribe in the drama, or George Sand and Dumas in romance, or Rossini and Auber in the musical world. Death has since robbed us of three—Decamps,[1] Vernet, Delacroix; and two are left, Ingres and Meissonier.

"A bourgeois notion is abroad in certain classes that Meissonier's genius consists in painting very little pictures. His principal merit, on the contrary, is that his work is greater, and especially more solid, than that of our *soi-disant* historical painters. . . . . Look at the *Emperor at Solferino*. The principal personage, posted in front of his staff, is looking on at the battle as a cool player studies a chess-board. A score of officers around him, all like himself on horseback, are waiting his orders. In the distance a regiment is seen escalading, in order of battle, a breastwork crowned with poplars. On the right, in the foreground, some artillerymen are manœuvring their guns, the corpses of a French soldier and two white Austrians, torn to rags by some explosion, show where the battle has passed by. Even if you have no knowledge to appreciate the truth of drawing, the solidity of execution, sincerity of colour, the picture will impress you profoundly; it will be greater in the tablets of your memory than it is within its frame. You understand now, perchance, for the first time, the movement—tranquil and profoundly melancholy—of a general staff, that mainspring of battles. In any case you will be charmed with the truth, the simplicity of the characters, &c.

"Now, having studied this familiar *victory* 'presentée sans emphase'—recross the room and look at the *Retreat of* 1814. It hangs exactly opposite to make an antithesis. It is also a picture of a general staff, but of a staff in defeat. Napoleon

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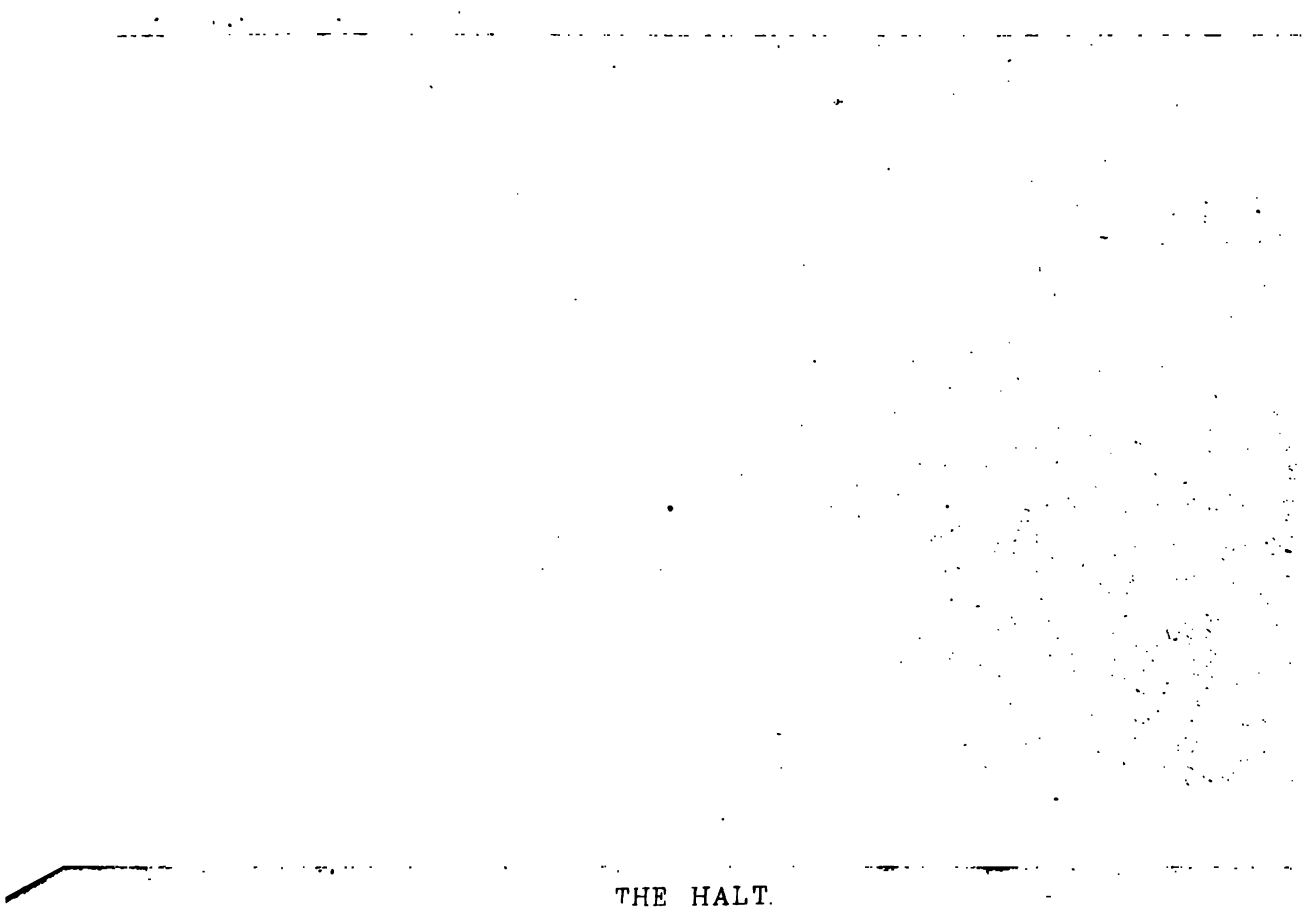
[1] Alexandre Gabriel Decamps was born in Paris, in 1803; he studied under Bouchat and Abel de Pujol; he disliked severe classicism, and preferred a realistic style; painted much in Turkey, the Levant, and Egypt; and shows a fondness for introducing scriptural figures in his Eastern sketches. He died at Fontainebleau, 1860.—(*C. C. Black.*) Sir R. Wallace is the possessor of a large collection of his works, principally of Scriptural or Oriental subjects, and a number of water-colour drawings, the whole of which were exhibited at Bethnal Green Museum in 1872.

conquered, but firm and resigned, is at the head of a group of the generals and marshals of France. His fine head is crowned with that 'auréole de malheur,' which outlives all other crowns in history. In a melancholy manner he presses his horse along a road where the snow is heaped up and stained and trampled by the wheels of the tumbrils and the feet of the soldiers of the army. This road of the French campaign is the lamentable track on which our fortunes were spilled. A grey sky hangs like a shroud over the disgrace of the favourite of the gods. The companions of his glory—for none has yet betrayed him—follow him sadly, sick in body and soul. A chilling wind makes them shudder beneath their cloaks. We recognize Drouot, M. de Flahaut, Berthier, who is sleeping in his saddle and sinking with fatigue. The hardiest of all is Ney, 'nature rustique,' he will certainly never die of cold. The body of the army is advancing in a crowd, 'en tas, en pâte, sur une ligne parallèle.' The eye distinguishes muskets, drums, rags. This troop of obscure heroes appear to be closing up to each other in their distress for mutual warmth. But the ranks are unbroken; it is a retreat, not a disbandment; the enemy would still find 'à qui parler, s'il tombait sur ces gaillards-là!' Never, I think, has Meissonier been better inspired than this year; never has he attempted such great things; never has his genius taken so high a flight.

"You may criticise, in the *Solferino*, a certain appearance of *décousu*, which is the effect of the cannon smoke spread here and there in white patches," &c., &c.

M. Claretie informs us that, for the "1814" picture, Meissonier borrowed the identical coat of Napoleon from the "Musée des Souverains," and had it copied by a tailor with "une exactitude Chinoise;" crease for crease, button for button. He then put it on himself, in his studio, and, sitting on a wooden horse saddled in imitation of the white charger of the Emperor, he studied his own figure in a mirror. M. Ph. Burty found him in this attitude one day, stifling in a hot summer's day, under the heavy "redingote," studying the fall of the skirt over the crupper of his wooden horse.



THE HALT.

He also prepared in his studio, with infinite pains, an arrangement of a miniature landscape, strewn with a white powder resembling snow, and models of tumbrils and waggons on heavy wheels, which he drew through the lanes of his powdered landscape, that he might study the furrows and the fall and deposit of the scattered snow at leisure.

Mr. F. G. Stephens, in his "Flemish and French Painters," mentions that the Emperor Napoleon, engaged at the same time upon his "Life of Cæsar," used similar methods of models of Roman encampments and strategic works, to produce in his mind a full realization of the scenes he wished to describe.

In either case, and in the case of the so-called pre-Raphaelite school which had its time in England, the conscientious labour and minute study of detail so cheaply censured by those who are too vain or too idle to submit to it, produced results in immortal works which are finally judged by the elevation of their general aim and its successful attainment; and not by the valuation of their parts, as the critics hostile to this method assume. The pre-Raphaelite works of Millais, Holman Hunt, Walker, and others, live by the soul that is in them; and there are no works of Meissonier which contain a deeper sentiment and a better refutation of the common accusation against him, of want of feeling, and contentment with material ends, than these Napoleonic pictures of "1807," and "1814," and *Solferino;* upon the details of which he expended such an unsparing amount of labour.

In the number of "L'Art," for January, 1876, there is a very full notice of the two Napoleonic pictures, "1814" (*La Rétraite de Russie*) and "1807" (*Friedland*)—illustrated by several enlarged cuts of the details—from which I have extracted the following:—

"1807," like "1814," is a page of history, but it is of triumph. The *Retreat from Moscow* showed Napoleon returning painfully across the steppes, covered with snow, under a low grey sky, followed by his staff, gloomy and discouraged. It was the crumbling of the Imperial fortunes. Here, on the contrary, we see their culmination. Buonaparte is at the apogee of his power. The whole scene is glistening in the light of the sun of victory; its radiance floats over the plain and the horizon, and enfolds the army in a vast aureole; the cuirasses scintillate, helmets glitter, the swords reflect lightnings from the sky—and yet, simultaneously with this scene of triumph at Friedland, who shall count the stifled sobs of France? The painter has addressed himself to the expression of this idea. Look over the vast plain stretched out '*à perte de vue*,' barren of foliage and of vegetation. The burning breath of the cannon has consumed and ruined it all. No—one field of rye was left verdant, and *that* now is being ruined—trampled under the feet of the triumphant army. The Emperor, on a rising ground, is surrounded by his staff, amongst whom are his marshals, Bessières, Duroc, and Berthier. Although he is in the middle distance, he is the soul of the picture, and fixes the attention and the look of the spectator, towards whom he appears to be advancing. On his left and rear, Nansouty is waiting with his division for the signal to defile; further back is seen the 'Vieille Garde,' with their grenadier caps and white breeches; behind them, squadron after squadron of troops, and an infinite perspective dotted with men as far as the eye can follow it into the distance."

A principal feature in the foreground of this picture is the charge of the regiment of cuirassiers, passing at full gallop in front of the Emperor, who salutes them; and each, as he passes the mound on which Napoleon stands, turns round and rises in the stirrups, and waves his sword in the air. As M. Claretie says: "L'élan, la fougue, l'emportement de tout ce régiment au galop, voilà qui est admirable et intraduisible."

The picture deserves to be re-christened from the significance of this incident alone, "*Morituri te salutant!*"

Meissonier is said to have worked upon this picture for fifteen years: he modelled all the horses in wax, and *every* figure was drawn from the life. It was sold to Mr. Stewart, of New York, for about 300,000 francs.

A very humorous character-picture of the year 1865, is is called *Une Chanson*, and represents a scene in a spacious guard-room, heavily vaulted like a crypt, and rudely furnished with a wooden table and benches. A soldier of the sixteenth century, apparently passing through a sentimental stage of drunkenness, is sitting on the table, with a guitar of many strings,and chanting at the top of his voice a song of a melancholy or maudlin character; his comrade, astride of the bench, is listening and watching with a comical expression of amusement. *L'Ordonnance*, of 1866, is a very celebrated picture, and is also a military piece, of the period of the Revolution. It represents three figures of soldiers in the richly decorated ante-room of some palace, or private mansion, their temporary quarters; and an orderly delivering a despatch. The officer, with his back to the fire, reading the despatch with all the arrogance of ephemeral rank, is the ideal of Scott's inimitable creation, Dugald Dalgetty. The soldiers wear long plaited locks of hair and pigtails, and the details of the costumes and the furniture are almost microscopically rendered, and the textures and the "chatoyants" effects are such as Meissonier alone can produce. Of the same year, 1866, is the picture of *Marshal Saxe and his Staff*, which was sold, at a sale in New York, for 8,600 dollars.

In the Salon of 1866, two pictures of M. Charles Meissonier were spoken of with very favourable criticism, containing, M. Edmond About says, "a little of the brilliancy which 'superabounds in the work of his illustrious father,' and attracting attention not only for the spirit that

they display, but for the special qualities of a painter which the public recognizes in them."

Our narrative has now arrived at the great year 1867; when, as M. Théodore Duret remarks (*Les Peintres Français en* 1867), the Universal Exhibition of living artists at the Champ de Mars, and the Annual Exhibition of the Champs Elysées; the Exhibition of the works of Ingres at the "Palais des Beaux Arts," and of Théodore Rousseau at the "Cercle" of the Rue de Choiseul; and the Private Exhibitions of MM. Courbet and Manet, brought under the eyes of the public a series of works of French painters, which permitted a judgment to be passed on the school in general and the principal characteristics of its members.

It was at the Annual Exhibition at the Champs Elysées of this year, that M. Fichel came forward with a picture in the style of M. Meissonier, which attracted a great deal of attention, and of which the "Athenæum" says:—

> "Among *genre* pictures of this peculiar kind, M. Fichel occupies, in the absence of M. Meissonier, a prominent place with his capital *Amateurs before a Picture:* an old subject, but filled here with new matter."

Of the same year is M. Meissonier's *Cavalry Charge;* sold to Mr. Probasco, of Cincinnatti, for 150,000 francs.

CHAPTER III.

I HAVE before me a collection of magazine notices, in all the languages of Europe, of the Fine Arts Section of the International Exhibition of 1867. The painters of England and France appear to have entered into the rivalry of this occasion with all

> " The stern joy which warriors feel
> In foemen worthy of their steel;"

and the critics of each nationality are patriotic in their valuations.

An example of the conduct of their polemics on the side of the French, is given by the "Times" correspondent, who afterwards turns round and retaliates:

> "One wise critic declared that 'when he came to write about the English pictures he was in a difficulty; for, properly speaking, there *were no* pictures, and there *was no* school of painting to write about. Nevertheless, as a chemist would undertake to analyse any unknown substance put into his hands, no matter how unpleasant to his senses, he would undertake to examine this not very pleasing nondescript which the English painters put forward as Art.'"

I have not been able to discover the original of this quotation, or it would have been interesting to analyse the national idiosyncrasy that the foreign critic objected to. The "Times" correspondent considers that all the foreign

nations showed in their collections the influence of the French style, and that there were, properly speaking, only two distinct schools of art represented: the English and the French; but that the character of the French art was to be described as "the formulated wisdom of a school;" to which, rather unhappily, he applies the name of *chic*. Alluding to the organized system of training arranged for students of painting in France, under the bureaucratic direction of the Government, he says:—

> "We see more of *chic* in French pictures than in English, because the influence of School is more felt in France than in England. It is suggested to the young French painter what he shall see in Nature, and how he shall paint it; there is a danger, ever afterwards, that he will see and paint nothing else; and he has more or less of *chic*, according as he follows more or less freely the receipts of the School to which he belongs."

The system of Government patronage of the fine arts in action in France at this date, was the subject of a great deal of comment in pamphlets and magazine articles, of which the following is a specimen:—

> "The State alone is in a position to maintain the arts in the loftiest phase of their development, and its intervention, disastrous in all other quarters, is indispensable in this; for this reason it grants a subvention to the lyrical and literary theatres of the first order, and maintains the unrivalled establishments of Sèvres and the Gobelins. The 'Grand' painting is essentially in the same position; it can only subsist with the support and encouragement of the State. But what is the Government doing? It is abandoning the class of ideas of which it ought to be the guardian, even if all the world else deserted them; and is redoubling the impulse of the '*gôut bourgeois*,' by appearing, with its own purchases and rewards, as a competitor to the buyers of easel pictures. In acting thus it is blind to the elementary fact that this kind of painting has sufficient encourage-

ment of its own, from the profits that it gives to its authors, without State intervention."—*Les Beaux Arts en* 1867, *par M. Raymon.*

These remarks have reference in part to the patronage of Meissonier and his followers, by the purchase of their works for the Emperor's presents. An English critic, of the same date, says that "the thirty-five or forty pictures marked as presents from the Emperor, are unquestionably the very worst in the collection."

In the jury awards of the Exhibition eight grand prizes were allotted in the first two classes of the first group, which comprised not only paintings in oil, but other paintings and drawings. Of these, four went to French jurors, and the other four to foreigners: Kaulbach, of Bavaria; Knaus, of Prussia; Leys, of Belgium; and Ussi, of Italy. After these great or exceptional prizes, about sixty lesser ones of three different grades were decreed, out of which one of the first order went to Mr. Calderon; one of the second, to Mr. Erskine Nicol; and two of the third to other Englishmen, Messrs. Orchardson and Walker; and some little scandal was created at the time by the circumstance that Meissonier, Gérôme, Cabanel and Rousseau,[1] who were all upon the jury, all obtained grand prizes, while the other French painters on the jury, Fromentin, Bida, Français and Pils, were also distinguished by medals.

"While in some of the classes we have suffered through the jurors themselves being disqualified for prizes, in the department of painting, where it was of most consequence that such a rule should prevail, we have to complain grievously of the operation of the opposite rule. *Of the eight great prizes for painting, all of them were taken by jurors.* It is hardly sur-

[1] Born 1812. Pupil of Gros and Bertin; well known as a landscape painter. Died 1868.

prising, in these circumstances, that four fell to France and none to England.

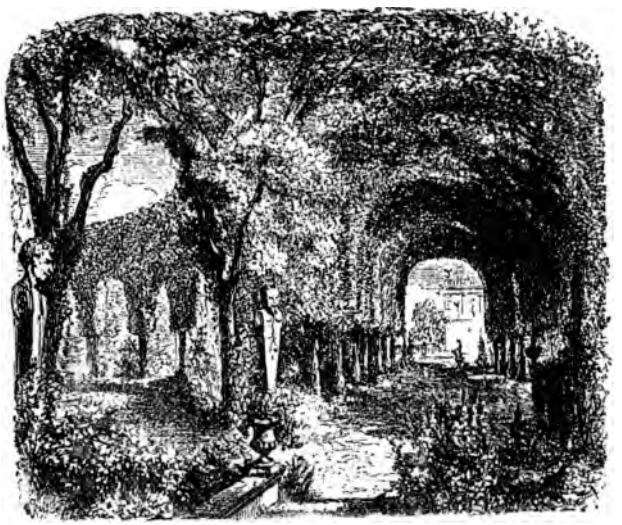
"Besides the eight principal prizes, there were sixty others of three different grades, of which only four were given to Englishmen."—*Standard*, July 3, 1867.

The English jurors, however, frankly repudiated the imputations thrown upon the acts for which they were responsible with their colleagues; but they, on the other hand, were accused of indifference and inaction in the matter. There were twelve jurors of the French, and only fourteen of other nations. The "Times" correspondent makes the following comments upon the awards of the "grands prix":—

"Wonderfully minute are the works of Meissonier, and they convey a great number of facts in a very small compass. But, after all, what are these facts? What does he really tell us of the joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, loves and hates of human kind? Much as we may admire his little bits of painting, does he ever touch our hearts? He never attempts to do so. All that he attempts is to bring a number of extremely placid people before us, sometimes singly, sometimes in groups; all these placid people are remarkable for faces of the hottest colour, and so far as there is any activity of interest in the pictures, it is only the activity of light and shadow—the play of colour in dress and furniture. This play of light and shadow, and graduating and interchanging colours, is often very pretty and sometimes very true;" (this is an obvious plagiarism of M. du Viel Chastel's allusion to the School of the *Chatoyants*) "but it would not be difficult to take picture after picture of Meissonier's, and to show his lapse from truth and the failure of his *chic*. There is the little picture marked 162, where the French General Desaix, with the Army of the Rhine, is represented as giving directions. There is such a want of air in this picture that a curious illusion is produced in it. There is a bay horse in the middle of it with its quarters to the spectator. Some thirty feet on this side of it there is a soldier pointing to something, who has his arm raised above the croup of the horse. That arm seems to be in the same plane with the

> horse's head, instead of being thirty feet on this side of the horse's tail. . . . There is the *Battle of Solferino:* the treatment is unusually hard, and as for the subject, if it be indeed a battle, it is a battle at such a safe distance that no one need know anything about it."

It is amusing to turn back from this criticism to the description of the picture, by M. Edmond About, given on



LE MALENTENDU.

From the "Contes Rémois."

page 51. The writer next attacks Gérôme, who, he says, "is not afraid to grapple with a moving theme; but the only themes that he thinks moving are themes of lust or horror." The celebrated *Phryne before the Judges*, less in the nude figure than in the features of the judges, had a revolting intention that would have degraded the most consummate perfection

of technical skill. Of Cabanel's *Paradise Lost*, he asserts that, "the sole motive of the picture, notwithstanding the solemnity of the subject, was the display of Eve's legs." Rousseau was a landscape painter, and he compares his works unfavourably with those of Mr. Vicat Cole. And in this manner the battle of the critics was waged.

Their attention, however, is on both sides more generally directed to the schools of "*high, historic, and sacred art*," at that period everywhere in perigee (and especially so in France, since the death of Delaroche, Ary Scheffer, and Flandrin); or to the so-called *romantic* school extinguished with Delacroix; or to the *realistic* school led on by Géricault. (The mere vocabulary of the classifications is bewildering, and the selections of representative leaders are as diverse as the definitions of the catch-words that are used.) M. Meissonier, however, *unâ voce* escapes classification. He is regarded by none as either *high*, or *romantic*, or *realistic;* he is certainly never accused of *cold classicism*, nor, on the other hand, is he an "ardent realist." When it is desired to speak evil of him he is mentioned with a mob, as one of them; but no two among the critics select the same associates or imitators of him. Mr. Beavington Atkinson, in the "Contemporary Review," says:—

> "There are no more sparkling pictures in the whole world than the small cabinet works of Meissonier, Plassan, Fichel, Vetter, Toulmouche, Duverger, Frère, Hillemacher and Leleux," and proceeds to point out his cleverness in the treatment of trivial subjects, his *heartlessness* as compared especially with Edouard Frère; "each of these painters, however, is avowedly inimitable *in his way*."

But Meissonier's he has shown to be a worthless way. Mr. H. O'Neil, in the "Fortnightly Review," less tenderly

minded, attributes the "increasing popularity of French Art" to the circumstance that—

> "Its professors content themselves with small efforts, attempting only what is capable of being effected *without much thought or labour*," (this of Meissonier!) "The subjects generally are of the most trivial nature, requiring none of the highest powers of the mind in their elucidation. Such are the works of Meissonier, Fichel, Plassan, Chavet, and what may be termed the boudoir school. . . . When, however, they attempt anything of a wider range, as Meissonier, in his picture representing the *Emperor at Solferino*, the result is a failure. Meissonier's art is always too positive, metallic, hard, and deficient in air; and his faults are all the more conspicuous when he attempts a composition of more than a few figures."

The pictures of Frère, of Jules Breton, of the Prussian Knaus, and of the Dutchman Israels, are everywhere commended for the quality of sympathy and pathos, which is with almost equal unanimity assumed to be absent from those of Meissonier. In the "Quarterly Review" of this date, there is a short and lively article, headed the "Pictures of the Year," in which comparisons are drawn between *pairs* of representative painters, English and French: Edouard Frère is opposed to Mr. T. Faed, R.A., who has the English desire of finding a *moral* in everything (like Alice's "Countess," in Wonderland), and, in his eagerness to teach a lesson, misses the Frenchman's charm of simplicity. The humour of Knaus is, on the other hand, pointed out as a quality which separates him entirely from the French school, who "in painting unaccountably neglect the comical side of things." The above are the principal criticisms that affect Meissonier,—as to pathos and humour, *quot homines tot sententiæ*, and almost the same may be said of the technical stricture as to his paintings being too "positive, metallic, &c.," but the imputation that he painted

without thought or labour appears to be rash, and answerable by a reference to facts.

From the Official Reports made under the direction of our own Government by Mr. Cope of the Royal Academy, I extract the following:—

> "The number of oil pictures exhibited by France is no less than 625. France has, in fact, considered this as a great international competitive trial of strength; and we find that galleries, palaces, churches, and museums have poured forth their treasures to swell the amount of works, and to assert the supremacy of France in matters of taste. The works were most carefully selected out of (it is stated) the number of 10,000, by a jury composed of the very ablest painters in France."

After noticing the absence of representatives of the severe classic style of David, and the gap caused in the branch of religious or Christian art by the death of Ingres and Hippolyte Flandrin, and the failure of Cabanel to maintain this style, Mr. Cope goes on to add:—

> "But if we turn in another direction, and inquire into the condition of the modern 'romantic' and '*genre*' school, we get a very different result; for we find a long list of names of very excellent artists. Conspicuous among them are Meissonier and Gérôme. The former contributes fourteen, the latter thirteen works; and, although their pictures are of cabinet proportions, they may be considered the principal upholders of French art in the Exhibition.
>
> "As excellent examples of the talent of Meissonier, may be mentioned the following pictures, although all of them are more or less stamped with his peculiar microscopic genius: *The Emperor at Solferino*, one of his most complete and important works; the extent of space, the minute accuracy and finished drawing, the variety of character in the figures of men and animals, the quiet grey sky, and the spirited execution, are all admirable. Equally good is *Napoleon I. in Russia:* the severe, leaden, cold sky; the advancing Emperor and his staff, muffled and stern; the tramping mass of troops in the middle-distance;

and the broken, hard, cloddy ground, half covered with snow, are excellent.

"The same qualities are equally apparent in the natural look and truth of effect in the picture of *General Desaix* listening to a peasant who is giving intelligence. The simple action and character of the countryman are as characteristic as the group of generals round the fire in the country wood.

"In his pictures of figures somewhat larger in scale, Meissonier is less excellent, and we miss that peculiarly focussed look which is one of his great excellencies; as, for instance, in his *Portrait of Mr. G. Delahante*, and, in a lesser degree, in his *Lecture* and *l'Ordonnance*."

Extract from the official catalogue of the Exhibition :—

Meissonier (Jean-Louis-Ernest), né à Lyon, élève de L. Cogniet. Méd. 3e cl., 1840; 2e cl., 1841; 1re cl., 1843, croix de la Légion d'honneur, 1846; méd. 1re cl., 1848; gr. méd. d'honneur, 1855; officier de la Légion d'honneur, 1856; membre de l'Institut, 1861. A Poissy (Seine-et-Oise).

449. L'Attente. Salon de 1857. Appartient à Mme. Meissonier.
450. Le Maréchal ferrant. Salon de 1861. App. à M. Bianchi.
451. Portrait de Mme. Henri Thénard. Salon de 1861.
452. S. M. l'Empereur à Solferino. Salon de 1864. Musée du Luxembourg.
453. "1814," Campagne de France. Salon de 1864. App. à M. G. Delahante.
454. "1807."
455. Lecture chez Diderot. Appartient à M. P. Demidoff.
456. Le Capitaine. App. à M. le Marquis d'Hertford.
457.[1] Cavaliers se faisant servir à boire. id.
458. Corps de Garde. id.
459. Portrait de M. G. Delahante.
460. Lecture. Appartient à M. X—.
461. L'Ordonnance. Appartient à M. Prosper Crabbe.
462. Renseignements: le Général Desaix à l'armée de Rhin et Moselle.

The Exhibition of 1867, the culminating incident of the Empire, may be regarded as that also of the triumph of the career of M. Meissonier.

[1] Cav. à la porte d'une auberge, or *La Halte*, mentioned on page 45.

For good or for evil, it was abundantly evident that his influence had come to prevail at this date very widely, not in France alone, but throughout Europe; in the absence of Delaroche and the other great masters recently deceased, he had become *de facto*, if not *de jure*, the tacitly recognized leader of French Art. The critics would not have it so, to whom he represents the ultimate verdict of the "uninstructed people," and the fallacy of cherished traditions, but his success was already too plainly on record to be ignored by them.

In the pompous closing ceremony of the presentation of the prizes by the Emperor, his *Battle of Solferino* was the central object of the Art Trophy erected in the space cleared for the ceremony, along with works of Reimers, the Russian painter; Knaus, of Prussia; Rousseau, the French landscape painter; and others. In the subsequent exhibitions of the Salon, Meissonier is represented rather by the works of his pupils and imitators than by his own. During the war he laid down his brush and joined the army as a volunteer. Interesting anecdotes will, no doubt, be brought to light in his memoirs; of his adventures on this occasion, and of his narrow escape of being shut up in Metz with General Bazaine; and there is no doubt that a much larger work than the present might be filled with a retrospect of his work under the Republic.

A valuable sketch of the course of the French School in general during the decade that intervened between the two International Exhibitions of 1867 and 1878, is given in a re-publication of the letters written by M. Lafenestre to various journals, on the annual Salons.[1]

---

[1] L'Art Vivant. La peinture et la sculpture aux Salons de 1868-1877.

LE HÉRAUT D'ARMES DE MURCIE.

From "Paris-Murcie"—Numero unique, Dec. 1879.

It opens gloomily in 1868, when the writer is alarmed at a lethargy, or a spirit of hesitancy, or a subservience to passing fashion, in the disciples of the two great leaders, Ingres and Delacroix, recently deceased:—

> "Powerful as were these great masters, there was in each of their methods (*organization*) a vice that opened a door, in the face of their works, to false theories in art. Under the pretext of STYLE, the pupils of Ingres become careless in their study of luminous effects, of solidity of forms, and of truth of *relief;* and those of Delacroix, engrossed in the pursuit of COLOUR harmonies, have rapidly lost their respect for truth of drawing."

This is the eternal balancing between the cold classicism of form and the sensual cultivation of colour, that besets the mere student of a school in art, and from which the man of genius escapes by his apprehension of the higher qualities of "sentiment and expression." The equally well-known separation of the *peintres émus* and the *peintres habiles*, supplies a better test for the detection of a genius that will survive its contemporaries, and seize, as Meissonier has done, the sympathies of the uninstructed *first*, and the critics *afterwards*.

In the Salon of 1869 M. Lafenestre finds his hero, destined to redeem the French school by a bold idealism, in M. Chevenard, whose works are very resembling in character the grand religious subjects of our Mr. Herbert, R.A.; but he gives a good part of his attention (though obviously *contre gré*) to the steadily prevailing style of Meissonier. He makes his criticism of a picture, in minute proportions by M. Detaille (whom he alludes to as *a pupil* of Meissonier), the occasion of separating the works of Meissonier himself, and of those really appreciating his influence, from the crowd of imitators who are producing

little "scenes of family life unworthy of the interpretation of painting," or fitter for illustration by the "*prestesse du crayon.*"

> "A picture ought, in the first place, to *be* a picture, *i.e.*, to charm the sight by harmony of colours, accuracy of drawing, logic, and composition. A fine touch of the pencil, a lifelike attitude, an effect of true light, are worth more in a picture than all the ingenious subtleties and delicate refinements of the finest wit. An interior of Chardin, not larger than a hand, will be often more interesting than a most complicated melodrama of Greuze. . . . The influence of M. Meissonier, strikingly obvious in the case of M. Detaille, re-appears in most of our painters of familiar subjects; it is not a thing to be surprised at or to complain of. M. Meissonier, an artist of understanding (*esprit*), has never fallen into the error commented above. He has never *confounded the literary with the picturesque.* His pictures are valuable as pictures; not on account of their subjects (which, for the most part, are common and insignificant), but for the vivacity and the precision of their execution. His imitators—imitators though they be—have therefore always a chance of being artists; for they have acquired of him the habit of looking at the *expressive side* of nature."

The English public had never a better opportunity for the study of the history of the development of the French school of painting, and Meissonier's position in it, than was afforded by the Exhibition of the collections of Sir Richard Wallace at the Bethnal Green Branch of the South Kensington Museum, in 1872; and the contemporary notices (which we have not space to transcribe) are full of instructive commentaries on this exhibition. It was as obvious on this occasion that Meissonier was *facile princeps* in his own style, and that his genius was independent of any preceding school or master; as it had been in 1867 that his influence was spreading widely in France and Germany, as well as in England and the rest of Europe.

Those who were accustomed to the closer study of the works of Mr. Millais, found much analogy between his methods and tendencies and those of Meissonier, a resemblance carried into the details of their work, and especially obvious during the pre-Raphaelite period of Mr. Millais's

LA CULOTTE DES CORDELIERS.
From the "Contes Rémois."

career, in their common quality of utter conscientiousness in detail. The works by which M. Meissonier was represented, were the *Polichinello*, of 1860 (mentioned on page 38); *Throwing Dice; The Connoisseurs; Napoleon I. and Staff;* the *Visitors*, the picture mentioned on page 11 as being the first exhibited by the artist at his début in 1834; *A Cavalier of the time of Louis XIV.;* the *Decameron* scene

of 1853, described on page 31; *St. John in Patmos; The Roadside Inn;* a *Sentinel* and a *Cavalier of the time of Louis XIII.*, and a *Musqueteer of the time of Louis XIII.;* the *Bravos*, of 1853, described on page 30; *Gamblers*, and *La Halte*, or *L'Auberge* (see page 44). It will be seen from this catalogue that Sir Richard Wallace may claim to possess a perfectly historical series of Meissonier's work, representing each of the different phases of his art.

The "Gazette des Beaux Arts," for 1873, contains a series of ably-written articles, by M. René Ménard, upon the collection of M. Laurent Richard, in which the movement of contemporary French art was illustrated by well-selected examples. The school of landscape painting was the most thoroughly represented in this collection, which included eleven pictures of Théodore Rousseau, twelve of Jules Dupré, six of Troyon, four of Corot, besides specimens of Diaz, Ziem, Fromentin, and Marilhat, and was thus a most interesting field of study for the illustration of the "epoch" of 1830 to 1860. But, although landscape was the chief subject represented, it was not alone; Eugène Delacroix, Decamps, Millet, Meissonier, and, among the artists of another period, Chardin, Prud'hon, and Gericault were there, in works which, far from affecting the homogeneity of the whole collection, represented identical efforts in another direction to those in landscape.

Meissonier's two representative pictures in this collection were the *Joueur de Guitare* and the *Soldat sous Louis XIII.*

> "The *Joueur de Guitare* is of M. Meissonier's favourite class of subjects, but he does not interpret it in the Dutch manner. Terburg or Mieris would have introduced an audience, and placed a young person in satin by the musician's side, with an accessory individual in the background. All the world knows that M. Meissonier is not fond of painting women, and the

number of those that figure in his pictures may be counted upon your fingers. The guitar-player is alone, in a room decorated with subject tapestries, and studying his piece of music alone. He is a young man in a blonde wig, dressed in a *haut-de-chausse* tied with streaming ribands, and a chemisette of swelling sleeves. On the red cloth of the table at which he is seated are a few papers, a glass, and a metal ewer, the refined and conscientious execution of which must be appreciated by the lovers of art. Still the *ensemble* of this picture is defective in that precision which is generally characteristic of the artist; and we find in the other specimen, the *Soldat sous Louis XIII.*, a firmness and decision which are more clearly expressive of the real temperament of the painter.

"Conceived in a tone of colour that is almost metallic in its brilliancy (conçu dans une tonalité éclatante et même un peu métallique) the *Soldat* is a 'tableau type' in the *œuvre* of Meissonier. Every detail is emphasised, and the spectator may pause and examine each with the microscope, in admiration of the dexterity of the execution.

"But this is a merit of secondary degree, and Rembrandt was right in his saying that 'painting is not made to be smelt at.' Poussin, who agreed with Rembrandt in this respect, used to say that, to see a picture to advantage, you should stand at a distance from it equal to three times its size. Let us examine this work of M. Meissonier upon these conditions, and, putting on one side the magnifying glasses, let us see whether it fulfils the programme of the artist: to paint grandly on a canvas of microscopic dimensions.

"First, we are struck with the proud bearing of the soldier, who is standing erect in a paved courtyard, with a thin cane in his right hand, his left resting on the hilt of his sword. His felt bonnet, slightly thrown back, is plumed with red and white feathers; he wears a broad white collar which falls over a steel gorget, a buff jerkin, red breeches, and big boots. The head is painted with extraordinary firmness, and, fine as the execution is, there is in every part of it a decision of touch which accentuates the niceties of expression without any trickery, &c."

The criticism is accompanied by a very pretty vignette engraving of the *Soldat sous Louis XIII.*

At the Vienna Exhibition of 1873, M. Meissonier was represented by the Napoleonic pictures, "1807" and "1814," and *Solferino*, the *Peintre d'Enseignes*, the *Tournebride*, the *Petit poste de grand' garde*, the *Partie de Boules*, the *Route de la Salice aux Antibes*, and the *Fin d'une partie de cartes*. The Vienna "Tageblatt" calls him the "ace of trumps" of the French Section of Fine Arts; and his seven pictures "the constellation of seven stars of the Fine Arts Gallery."

The French School generally was, in the opinion of everybody, admirably represented in its own section; and its influence (as in 1867) in the galleries of other countries; and M. René Ménard says, in the "Gazette des Beaux Arts:"—"Although we may not completely approve the tendency of art with us, yet we cannot but acknowledge that Europe follows us wherever we go."

In Germany especially it was noticed at this time that easel pictures had completely banished the great symbolical school of Cornelius and Kaulbach. The leader of the German artists in this direction was rather M. Knaus than Meissonier, but the influence of Meissonier on Knaus during the residence of the latter in Paris, must have been important, if not absolutely decisive.

It would be useless to carry the record further. As I have stated before, on the authority of M. Claretie, we are promised memoirs in due time from M. Meissonier's own hand. In the meantime, all that could be added is recent in recollection of the public, and that which is not public—M. Meissonier's patriotic devotion and adventures during the war, his domestic and personal experiences of more recent date, and so forth—have, it is to be presumed, been withheld from publicity at his own desire. For he lives in

the full light of popularity and eminence, and surrounded by friends; and the imperfect sketches of his life that have appeared in pamphlets and periodicals are numerous, though they all deal with the subject under a reserve that it is obviously not yet the time to break through.

THE END.

NOTES.

It has been announced that an exhibition of the works of Meissonier is to take place in the new building of the *Société des Aquarellistes*, near the Madeleine, Paris, in the spring of 1882.

A series of photographs of Meissonier's "*Œuvres complètes*" is now in course of publication in parts.

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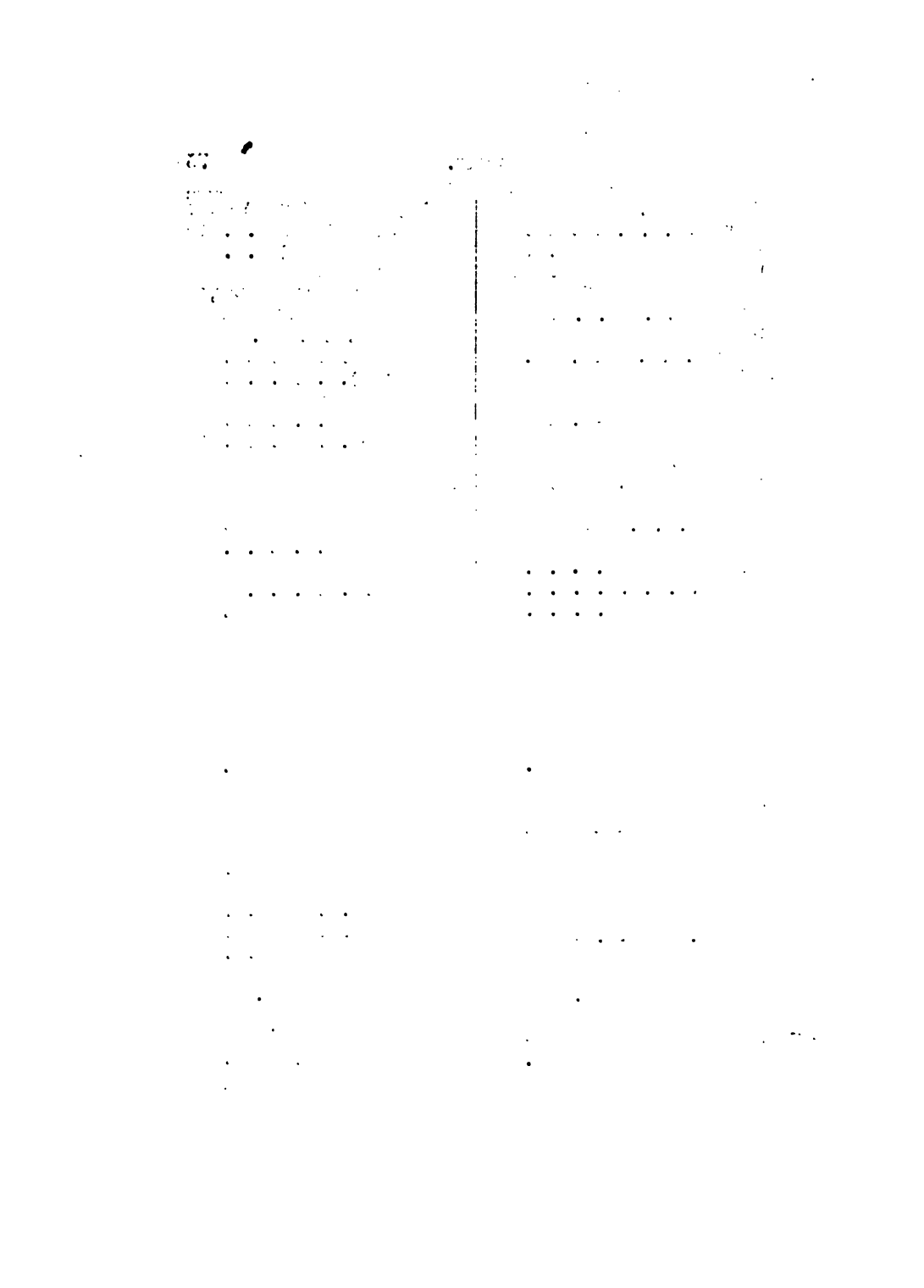

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